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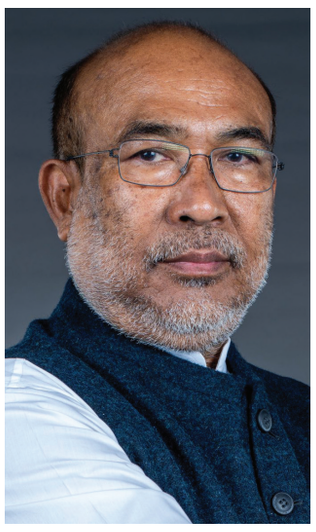
Manipur CM resigns ahead of no-confidence motion

Over 250 people have been killed in the state's ethnic conflict



Biren Singh PHOTO: X

IMPHAL, 9 FEB

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Sunday tendered his resignation to Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla at the Raj Bhavan in Imphal, officials said.

In a letter to the governor, Singh said, "It has been an honour to serve the people of Manipur thus far. I am extremely grateful to the central government for time actions, interventions, developmental work and implementation of various projects for safeguarding the interests of every single Manipuri."

"My sincere request to the Central government through your good office is to continue with the same. I take the opportunity to enumerate the most important ones of them

> **Sensing the climate, the Manipur chief minister has just resigned. This was a demand that the Congress has been making since early May 2023, when Manipur erupted**
>
> —Jairam Ramesh, Congress AICC General Secretary

... To maintain the territorial integrity of Manipur which has a rich and diverse civilizational history over thousands of years," the letter added.

He also requested the Centre to continue the "crackdown on border infiltration and to formulate policy for the deportation of the illegal immigrants and the fight against drugs and narco terrorism."

The CM urged the central government "to continue the stringent and fool-proof revised mechanism of Free Movement Regime (FMR) with the biometric being stringently applied time bound and faster border which is underway." Singh's resignation came hours after he returned from Delhi.

On Saturday, Singh convened a meeting with BJP-led ruling alliance MLAs at the CM Secretariat. The meeting was held in the wake of the opposition Congress seeking to move a no-confidence motion against the government led by Singh. More than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless since ethnic violence broke out in the state in May 2023. —*PTI*

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EXPLOSIVES SEIZED

Last year, 219 Naxalites were neutralised by security forces in separate encounters in Chhattisgarh PHOTO: X

31 Naxalites, 2 cops killed in encounter in Chhattisgarh

BIJAPUR, 9 FEB

In a major operation against the Naxalites, security forces gunned down 31 Naxalites during an encounter in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district on Sunday, police said. Two security personnel were also killed and as many others injured in the face-off.

The latest gunfight took place at a forest in Indravati National Park area in the morning when a joint team of personnel from different security forces was out on an anti-Naxalite operation, Inspector General of Police, Bastar Range, Sundarraj P said.

Two security personnel, one belonging to the state police's District Reserve Guard and the other from the Special Task Force, were killed in the gunfight and two others suffered injuries, he said. The two injured jawans, reported to be out of danger, were being airlifted to a better medical facility for treatment, he said. A huge cache of weapons and explosives has also been seized from the site, the official said.

Reinforcements have been rushed to the spot and a search operation is still underway in the area, he added. With this incident, 81 Naxalites have been gunned down by security forces in separate encounters in the state so far this year. Out of the 81 Naxalites 65 were killed in the Bastar division comprising seven districts, including Bijapur.

Last year, 219 Naxalites were neutralised by security forces in separate encounters in Chhattisgarh, according to police. —*PTI*

SRI LANKAN NAVY ARRESTS 14 INDIAN FISHERMEN

COLOMBO, 9 FEB

Sri Lankan authorities have arrested 14 Indian fishermen and seized their trawlers for allegedly venturing into the territorial waters of the island nation, the Navy said on Sunday.

The arrests took place during a special operation conducted in the sea area north of Mannar on Saturday, the Sri Lankan Navy said in a statement.

"The Sri Lanka Navy seized 2 Indian fishing boats and apprehended 14 Indian fishermen while they were poaching in Sri Lankan waters," it said.

The Navy continues to conduct regular patrols and operations in Sri Lankan waters to curb illegal fishing practices of foreign fishing boats, taking into account the impact of those practices on the livelihood of local fishermen, the statement said.

The arrested fishermen were brought to the Iranativu Island, where they will be handed over to the Assistant Directorate of Fisheries, Kilinochchi, for further legal action, the Navy said.

In a similar incident last week, Sri Lankan authorities arrested 10 Indian fishermen and seized one boat.

The fishermen issue is a contentious one in the ties between India and Sri Lanka, with Lankan Navy personnel even firing at Indian fishermen in the Palk Strait and seizing their boats in several alleged incidents of illegally entering Sri Lankan territorial waters. —*PTI*

DKS AT KUMBH MELA

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar and wife Usha Shuvakumar take a dip at the Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj on Sunday PHOTO: SALAR

Will end Naxalism by 31 March, 2026, says Amit Shah

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

Union Home Minister Amit Shah said that Naxals will be eradicated by 31 March, 2026. "I reiterate my resolve that before 31 March, 2026, we will completely eradicate Naxalism from the country so that no other citizens have to lose their lives," he wrote on X. The home minister said security forces have had a big success in Bijapur, Chhattisgarh.

31 Naxalites were killed in this operation and a huge amount of arms and explosives were recovered. Shah added that the security forces lost two brave soldiers in the effort to "end anti-human Naxalism" and the country will always be indebted to these heroes. "I express my heartfelt condolences to the families of the martyred soldiers," he said. —*PTI*

Veljan Group MD stabbed 70 times by grandson

HYDERABAD, 9 FEB

86-year-old industrialist V Janardhan Rao was reportedly stabbed to death by his grandson Kilaru Kirti Teja over a property dispute.

He was stabbed 70 times. Janardhan, the chairman and managing director of Veljan Group, had recently appointed another grandson as the manager of the company while transferring shares worth of Rs 4 crore to Teja.

Teja, his mother visited his residence on Thursday. Teja accused Janardhan of unfair treatment. An argument broke out, prompting Teja to murder his grandfather. His mother who had stepped away tried to intervene after hearing the commotion, but was also attacked, sustaining four stab wounds. She was rushed to a hospital where she is receiving treatment. —*Agencies*

Atishi resigns, LG urges her to stay till new govt forms

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

- BJP returned to power in Delhi after more than 26 years, winning 48 of the 70 assembly seats. AAP won 22 seats while the Congress drew a blank in the polls

Delhi Chief Minister Atishi handed over her resignation to Lt Governor V K Saxena on Sunday, a day after her Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) faced a crushing defeat in the assembly polls.

Atishi, who retained her Kalkaji seat, handed over her resignation to Saxena at Raj Niwas, officials said.

The LG's office said that Saxena has asked the outgoing CM to continue on the post till formation of a new government.

The BJP is expected to stake claim to power next week after Prime Minister Narendra Modi returns from a foreign visit, party leaders said.

"Hon'ble Lt Governor, Shri VK Saxena today received the resignation of Hon'ble CM, Ms Atishi. He asked her to continue in her position till the formation of the new government," Raj Niwas, Delhi posted from its official X handle.

The LG dissolved the Delhi Assembly effective from Saturday, 8 February.

A notification by the assembly secretariat issued a day before read, "In exercise of the power conferred upon me by sub-section (2)(b) of section 6 of the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991, I, Vinai Kumar Saxena, Lieutenant Governor of Delhi, hereby dissolve the Seventh Legislative Assembly of the National Capital Territory of Delhi with effect from 8 February." BJP returned to power in Delhi after 26 years, winning 48 of the 70 Assembly seats. The AAP won 22 seats while the Congress drew a blank in the polls held on 5 February. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

AAP leader Atishi submits her resignation as Delhi Chief Minister to Lt Governor VK Saxena on Sunday PHOTO: PTI

Rajnath arrives in City for Aero-India 2025

BENGALURU, 9 FEB

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday visited the production facility of Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) in Karnataka's Bengaluru to attend Aero India 2025, scheduled to be held from 10-14 February. Singh visited the state-of-the-art Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) MK1A production facility of HAL. The Tejas Mk1A is an advanced version of the LCA Mk1, enhanced to improve combat efficiency. The Tejas Mk1A is designed to carry out offensive air support, close combat, and ground attack missions with precision and agility. —*ANI*

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SINGER SAYS HE HAD PERMIT

Cops stop Ed Sheeran's Church Street show over lack of permission

Cubbon Park senior police officer said someone had complained of public nuisance PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

BENGALURU, 9 FEB

Bengaluru Police on Sunday morning halted British musician Ed Sheeran's live street performance in the city, citing lack of permission by the popular singer-songwriter.

The police stopped the gig, which was underway at Church Street, when the Grammy winner was midway into the performance of his chartbuster "Shape of You".

"We were going to play more than one song but we're being asked to play one song," he said on the microphone, before he started strumming the prelude of "Shape of You" on his guitar.

Just before he could finish the refrain of the song, a policeman stepped in and pulled the cables attached to the microphone and musical instruments.

A senior police official of the Cubbon Park police station said Sheeran was performing "without any permission so they had to stop".

"The police got there because someone had complained of public nuisance," he told PTI, adding if the musician and his team had the permit they could have shown it to the cops.

While a section of social media users were unhappy about the outcome, Bangalore Central MP PC Mohan said rules are same for everyone.

"Shape of You... but not of permits. Ed Sheeran's impromptu gig on Church Street hit a sour note as Bengaluru police pulled the plug over missing permissions. Even global stars must follow local rules—no permit, no performance!" Mohan wrote on X.

"Ed Sheeran surprised fans with an impromptu performance on Church Street, Bengaluru, but then came along a policeman..." said a Sheeran fan.

"Just saw Ed Sheeran on Church Street. He sang his song , but sadly the police stopped him in the middle," commented another on the microblogging site.

Also known for tracks like "Perfect Duet", "Thinking Out Loud" and "Shivers", Sheeran is currently on the India leg of his Mathematics (+-=÷x) Tour. —*PTI*

Security guard stabbed in Indiranagar attack

BENGALURU, 9 FEB

A security guard originally from North India was reportedly attacked and stabbed by a group of unknown assailants within the Indiranagar police station limits on Saturday night. The deceased Mahesh, suffered stab wounds during the incident but is now in stable condition. According to Mahesh's account, the attack took place around 9.30pm as he was walking home towards Byappanahalli. A group of men allegedly obstructed his path and began to assault him, with one individual drawing a knife and stabbing him. *—Salar News*

Mysuru: KSRTC bus hits tree, people escape unhurt

MYSURU, 9 FEB

Approximately 40 passengers on a state-run KSRTC bus had a narrow escape when their vehicle crashed into a roadside tree after the driver, who suffered from epilepsy, fell unconscious while attempting to drive safely near Chikkarangashettydoddi in Hanur taluk, Chamarajnagar district, on Sunday. Five passengers seated near the front, including the driver, sustained injuries and were promptly taken to Kollegal Hospital. The incident occurred as the bus was making its way to Mysuru from Odeyarapalya. Eyewitnesses reported that the driver, who had a known history of epilepsy, experienced convulsions and collided with the tree while manoeuvring to maintain control along the Odeyarapalya stretch. Upon receiving news of the accident, Hanur Police Sub-Inspector Manjunath and other officials quickly arrived on the scene, transporting all five injured individuals, including the driver, to Hanur Government General Hospital. The local police have registered a case regarding the incident. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: FB

Darshan thanks fans for support during his jail time

BENGALURU, 9 FEB

Kannada actor Darshan Thoogudeepa has spoken out for the first time since being granted bail in the Renukaswamy murder case. The 47-year-old actor expressed his gratitude towards fans for their unwavering support during challenging times. Darshan and actress Pavithra Gowda are among the 17 accused in the case, stemming from the murder of Renukaswamy, who was killed after allegedly sending inappropriate messages to Gowda. In a video posted on X, Darshan requested fans to refrain from queuing outside his home on his upcoming birthday, 16 February, citing health issues. He reassured supporters of his intention to meet them soon and expressed appreciation for producers who have been patient regarding his film commitments. *—PTI*

Couple killed as cement mixer truck hits scooter in City

BENGALURU, 9 FEB

A couple lost their lives in a tragic accident after a cement mixer truck knocked them down while they were riding in Uttarahalli on Sunday. The deceased have been identified as Shabana Begum and Asif Ahmed, residents of Tannery Road. Eyewitnesses said the speeding cement mixer truck rammed into their scooter, throwing them off and killing them on the spot. According to police reports, the couple was on their way to a Dargah when the accident occurred at Madhu Junction in Uttarahalli. Cops took the truck driver into custody and have launched a probe into the circumstances. *—Salar News*

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh visits the LCAMK1A production facility of Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, in Bengaluru on Sunday; Fighter jets and other flights at the static display at Yelahanka Air Force Station ahead of Aero India 2025
PHOTOS: MOHAMMED ASAD/ PTI

Indigenous aircraft to dominate Aero India

Tejas Mk 1A, HAL's LUH will perform intricate manoeuvers at Aero India Bengaluru debut

BENGALURU, 9 FEB

The prowess and agility of India's defence aircraft, built mostly with indigenous components, will be on display in Bengaluru on Monday, the inaugural day of Aero India 2025.

The aerial display will start at 10.20 am on the inaugural day.

Six acts are planned for the inaugural aerial display, including intricate maneuvers by HAL Tejas LCA Mk 1A, considered a shining example of India's stride in indigenous aerospace technology and defense self-reliance, according to Aero India website.

Developed by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), Tejas Mk 1A is an advanced version of the Light Combat Aircraft and it is designed to meet the operational requirements of the Indian Air Force (IAF).

HAL's HTT-40 or Hindustan Turbo Trainer-40, which is used for primary flight training, aerobatics and instrument flying, will also put on a show on the inaugural day. With over 80 per cent of the aircraft's components, including airframe, avionics and landing gear, domestically designed and manufactured, when HTT-40 flies in the air tomorrow, it will truly be shot in the arm for 'Make-in-India' movement.

Russian aircraft Su-30KMKI, considered a cornerstone of the IAF combat fleet will also put on a show tomorrow.

HAL's Light Utility Helicopter (LUH), again a landmark achievement when it comes to self-reliance in defense aviation, is the other aircraft on display at the inaugural show.

On 11 February, the aerial display will happen from 12 noon onwards and on 13 and 14 February, it will take place twice a day from 9.30am to 12 noon and 2pm to 4.30 pm.

The performing aircraft on the other days will also include Hanse, Dornier Test Bed, Su-57 Felon, supersonic strategic bomber B-1B Lancer, KC-135 and F-35.

Flypast display, which will take place during the inaugural ceremony, will include 13 formations such as Akash, Dhwaj, Tejas, Bhim, Rakshak, Drona, Yodha, Varuna, Saarthi, Arjun, Netra Shakthi and Trishul. *—PTI*

US to dazzle viewers at Aero India

The United States is set to impress at the Aero India 2025 show, featuring advanced defence equipment such as the F-16, F-35, KC-135 Stratotanker, and B-1 bomber. More than 25 American exhibitors will explore business opportunities, demonstrate innovations.

BEL to unveil AI-powered warfare tech

Navratna Defence PSU Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) will showcase its latest offerings for the armed forces at Aero India 2025.

Among the key offerings in communication equipment are variants of Software Defined Radio, Radio on the Move, and High Capacity Radio Relay.

Electro-optic devices on display will include the Uncooled Thermal Imager Sight for Assault Rifles, Passive Night Vision Goggles, and the Border Observation Surveillance System. Shipborne systems on display will include the Passive Hydrophone Element (Low and Medium Frequency), HUMSA-NG Transducer Element. It includes weapon systems like Pralay Missile, Long Range Land Attack Cruise Missile, and QRSAM. Land-based warfare systems will feature the Portable Anti-Drone System and Ground-Based ELINT System. *—PTI*

Karnataka expects ₹10L cr investments at global meet

BENGALURU, 9 FEB

Karnataka is poised to attract investment commitments of approximately Rs 10 lakh crore from a diverse range of industries during its biennial investor meet, scheduled for February 11-14 in Bengaluru. M B Patil, Minister for Large and Medium Scale Industries, expressed optimism about the outcome, anticipating that at least 70 percent of these commitments will materialise.

Titled "Invest Karnataka 2025 – Global Investors Meet (GIM 2025)," the event aims to establish the state as a leading global investment hub. The theme, "Re-Imagining Growth," reflects the current global focus on tech-driven, green, and resilient development amidst challenges such as geopolitical strife in Ukraine and Israel, shifting policies in the US, and the aftermath of the pandemic.

Patil highlighted the increasing importance of electric vehicles and green hydrogen, stating that fossil fuels will gradually be phased out, necessitating adaptive strategies for sustainable economic growth. The inaugural session of the summit will feature the Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, with participation from various central ministers.

The meet will include business sessions, such as a semiconductor summit on 12 February, as well as an award function recognising industries that have significantly contributed to Karnataka's growth. Participating countries will include 19 nations, with nine having dedicated pavilions. *—PTI*

REPAYMENTS DEMANDED

Bidar sugar factory defaults ₹872cr loan

BIDAR, 9 FEB

Officials of District Central Cooperative (DCC) Bank put pressure on the management board of Naranja Cooperative Sugar Factory, demanding either the repayment of loans taken or handover of the warehouse key.

Senior bank officials, along with loan recovery officers and 400 other staff members, visited Naranja Cooperative Sugar Factory near Janwada in Bidar taluk and submitted a memorandum to the factory's Chairman DK Sidram.

The officials told Sidram that as of 31 January, 2025, the factory owed a total of Rs 872.55 crore to the DCC Bank, which included Rs 669.39 principal, Rs 185.50 crore interest and Rs 17.66 crore penalty.

Out of the Rs 872.55 crore, sugar mortgage loan alone accounted for Rs 92 crore, which included Rs 77.26 crore principal, Rs 13.57 crore interest and Rs 1.29 crore penalty.

PHOTO: FREEPIK

After an auditors report for 2022–23 financial year revealed a discrepancy of Rs 56.51 crore in the sugar stock, the bank has suspended three staff members.

The officials said that because of the non-repayment of the loan, the NABARD was not approving new loans; salaries, perks and increments of 500 bank employees have been withheld and affected 800 employees of Primary Agricultural Cooperative Societies. Sidram said factory would respond to the bank's demands soon and make a payment of Rs 20 crore towards interest. However, the warehouse key was still not handed over, and the sugar stock was not disclosed, a bank official said. *—Salar News*

CITY MAN DIES AFTER FALLING INTO OPEN DRAIN

BENGALURU, 9 FEB

A 65-year-old man lost his life after accidentally falling into an open drain while riding his bike near Poojanahalli Gate late on Saturday night.

The deceased, identified as Veerabhadra, was a resident of Hebbal and worked as a production manager at a garment factory on Tumakuru Road.

According to Devanahalli traffic police, the incident occurred around 11 pm when Veerabhadra was returning home via Ramasandra.

Preliminary investigations suggested that Veerabhadra was speeding and lost control of his bike while negotiating a turn. The vehicle skidded and he fell into the open drain, the police said. The body was handed over to the family after conducting post-mortem examination. The police have registered a case and are investigating. *—Salar News*

Preparations underway for Mysuru Kumbh Mela

MYSURU, 9 FEB

The district administration is finalising preparations for the 13th edition of the Kumbh Mela, a three-day festival set to commence on 10 February at Triveni Sangama, the confluence of the Cauvery, Kapila, and Spatika Sarvara rivers in T Narasipur.

The State Government has allocated Rs 6 crore for the event, and a preliminary meeting to address various arrangements was convened, presided over by Suttur Mutt Seer Sri Shivarathri Deshikendra Swamiji and Adichunchanagiri Mutt Seer Sri Nirmalanandanatha Swamiji.

Authorities have successfully erected stages across multiple locations for religious ceremonies, and measures for illumination and cleanliness have been implemented. To enhance safety, a temporary bamboo wall is being constructed along the river, alongside other precautionary measures designed to prevent incidents.

With lakhs of devotees anticipated to attend for the sacred dip during this auspicious Kumbha Mela, lifeguards are stationed at various points near the river to monitor participants as they seek spiritual cleansing.

Furthermore, fire and emergency services, along with police personnel, will be deployed at strategic locations to ensure the safety of all attendees, including both devotees and dignitaries, throughout the duration of the event.

Organisers hope the Kumbh Mela will foster spiritual reflection and community solidarity among the multitude of attendees visiting Triveni Sangama for this significant cultural and religious event. *—Salar News*

37-year-old woman dies of snake bite in Kollegal

KOLLEGAL, 9 FEB

A 37-year-old woman has died following a snake bite while working in a turmeric plantation at Ankanapura in the local taluk.

The deceased Sujatha, is a resident of Ankanapura. The incident occurred on Saturday while she was labouring in the fields owned by Somasundaram.

Other workers raised the alarm when they found her in a state of unconsciousness. She was promptly transported to Holycross Hospital near Kamagere; however, medical staff declared her dead on arrival. *—Salar News*

730 LAKES ILLEGALLY OCCUPIED

BBMP pledges to reclaim encroached lake lands

BENGALURU, 9 FEB

In response to years of neglect and inaction, the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) has committed to reclaiming encroached lake lands within the City. This pledge comes in the wake of a concerning report from the district administration, which revealed that 730 of the 837 lakes in Bengaluru Urban district have been illegally occupied.

Recent surveys conducted by the district administration have identified that 4,554 acres of lake area across 837 lakes have been encroached upon, with Yelahanka and Bengaluru North highlighting the most severe encroachment instances. A preliminary report from the KB Koliwad Committee, which first raised these issues six years ago, indicates that out of 1,545 lakes in both Bengaluru's Urban and Rural areas, an alarming 1,421 have fallen victim to encroachments.

According to report, out of 1,545 lakes in both Bengaluru's Urban and Rural areas, 1,421 have fallen victim to encroachments ***PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA***

Despite these alarming findings, action against the encroachers has been notably sluggish. The total lake area, including Rajakaluves (stormwater drains), spans approximately 57,576 acres, with encroachments claiming around 10,472 acres—4,277 acres in Bengaluru Urban and 6,195 acres in Bengaluru Rural. This data lays bare the scale of the crisis, spotlighting the urgent need for meaningful intervention that has been sorely lacking.

Historically an integral part of Bengaluru's ecosystem, these lakes were designed to alleviate water scarcity and promote urban sustainability. However, decades of unchecked urbanisation, administrative negligence, and collusion between land sharks and officials have expedited the near disappearance of many lakes. In January, BBMP reported to the Karnataka High Court that 235 acres across 183 active lakes have been encroached upon by private entities as well as government agencies. The administration's delayed response has emboldened illegal occupiers, resulting in irreparable damage to the city's vital water bodies.

Zones	Total encroachment (in acres)	Reclaimed (in acres)	Remaining Encroachment (in acres)
Bengaluru North	1,183	247	873
Bengaluru South	825	390	435
Anekal	719	701	18
Bengaluru East	677	214	463
Yelahanka	1,147	1126	21

In an attempt to address the situation, the BBMP previously allocated Rs 52.55 crore for lake conservation efforts. According to sources, it has successfully fenced 38,321 meters of lake boundaries, with an additional 12,575 meters still in progress. Furthermore, details of the encroachments have been published on its website in compliance with a directive from the Karnataka High Court. *—Salar News*

BJP's CM pick buzz grows after Delhi win

BJP winners also included several experienced senior leaders who are also in race for CM post

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

The buzz over BJP's chief ministerial pick has intensified after the party made a grand return to power in Delhi after a gap of more than 26 years, winning 48 seats in the 70-member Assembly.

Parvesh Verma's political currency skyrocketed with his stupendous victory over AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal from New Delhi by 4,089 votes, positioning him as a potential claimant to the top post in the upcoming BJP government. He is also the son of former Delhi chief minister Sahib Singh Verma.

The BJP winners also included several experienced senior leaders who are also in the race for the chief minister's post, party leaders said after the poll results were declared on Saturday.

"These include Ashish Sood and former state general secretary (organisation) Pawan Sharma," a top BJP functionary in Delhi said.

Sood, who won from Janakpuri by 18,766 votes, is a senior leader with some hands-on experience in administrative matters gained during BJP's rule in the South Delhi Municipal Corporation.

Other serious contenders to the top post include former Delhi BJP presidents Vijender Gupta and Satish Upadhyay.

The BJP leaders also didn't rule out the possibility of the party's national leadership placing its bet on a woman candidate for Delhi chief minister's post.

In that case, Rekha Gupta and Shikha Rai are two experienced leaders who may be considered, they said. While Rai defeated AAP heavyweight Saurabh Bharadwaj from Greater Kailash by 3,188 votes, Gupta won from Shalimar by 29,000 votes. *—PTI*

Revamping the Yamuna riverfront will be one of our main priorities
-Parvesh Verma, BJP leader
Bihar is Bihar. It needs to be understood. There won't be any impact of BJP win in Bihar
-Tejashwi Yadav, RJD leader

BJP president JP Nadda met Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday as the party's exercise to pick the new Delhi chief minister **PHOTO: PTI**

Fadnavis to give Rs 10 cr aid to Baba Amte's group

MUMBAI, 9 FEB

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis announced a significant increase in financial support for the Maharogi Sewa Samiti (MSS) in Chandrapur, founded by Baba Amte. The subsidy per patient will rise from Rs 2,200 to Rs 6,000, aiding the care of marginalised individuals, including those affected by leprosy and other disabilities. Speaking at an event celebrating the Samiti's 75th anniversary, Fadnavis declared a discretionary aid of Rs 10 crore, aiming to raise an additional Rs 65 crore through various measures. He commended the ongoing rehabilitation work of the MSS, now carried on by the Amte family's third generation, and emphasised the vital need for such support as the subsidy levels remained unchanged since 2012. *—PTI*

Gehlot urges action over atrocities on Hindus in B'desh

JAIPUR, 9 FEB

Former Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot has called on the Indian government to take diplomatic action to halt the ongoing "atrocities" against Hindus in Bangladesh. His comments followed recent revelations from Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh, who reported in the Lok Sabha that, since August, 23 Hindus have died and 152 incidents of attacks on Hindu temples have occurred in Bangladesh. Gehlot expressed concern on X over the government's silence on the matter, stating, "It is unfortunate that despite such a situation, the Indian government has not yet deemed it appropriate to make any statement on global platforms, or put pressure on Bangladesh." He urged the government to take concrete steps to protect Hindus and other minorities facing persecution in Bangladesh. *—PTI*

Arms, ammunition looted from IRB outpost in Manipur

IMPHAL, 9 FEB

Unidentified gunmen looted arms from India Reserve Battalion outpost in Manipur's Thoubal district, officials said. "Armed men who came in several vehicles looted at least six SLRs and three AK rifles from the personnel of IRB and Manipur Rifles from an outpost at Kakmayai in Thoubal district," officials told PTI. "Around 270 rounds of ammunition along with 12 magazines were also taken from the post," they said. Additional security forces have been rushed to the area and they are conducting search operations, officials said, adding that an investigation is also underway on the incident. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

President Murmu to visit Maha Kumbh Mela today

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

President Droupadi Murmu will visit the Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj on Monday and take a holy dip at the Sangam, her office said. "During her day-long visit to Prayagraj, the President will take holy dip and perform Pooja at Sangam, perform Pooja and Darshan at Akshayvat and Hanuman Mandir, and also visit the Digital Kumbh Anubhav Centre," the Rashtrapati Bhavan said in a statement. Sangam is the confluence of the Ganga, the Yamuna and the mystical Saraswati rivers. Maha Kumbh, which began on Paush Purnima (13 January), is one of the world's largest spiritual and cultural gathering, attracting devotees from across the globe. It will continue until Mahashivratri on 26 February. *—PTI*

AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal with Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann **PHOTO: PTI**

Delhi loss spells trouble for AAP in Punjab

CHANDIGARH, 9 FEB

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), whose "Delhi model" people rejected in the assembly polls, has to work out a "Punjab- specific model of development" to improve its performance in the only state where it is now in power, political observers said on Sunday.

Ronki Ram, professor of political science at Panjab University, said, "If people of Delhi did not support that model then why would people of Punjab support it?"

Pramod Kumar, chairperson of the Institute for Development and Communication, said, "They (AAP) promised to implement the Delhi model of development in Punjab. What fate that model has met in Delhi, the same fate it will meet in Punjab."

"They will have to plan a Punjab-specific model. The lesson is that the Delhi model will not function in Punjab," Kumar said.

"For AAP, this is the challenge of how to keep the party consolidated," Kumar said. *—PTI*

DELHI POLLS: 80% OF CANDIDATES LOST DEPOSITS

Congress candidates lost their security deposits on all but three seats in the Delhi Assembly polls as nearly 80 per cent of all contenders forfeited their deposits. All the candidates of the AAP, BJP and its allies, Janata Dal (United) and LJP (Ram Vilas) managed to save their security deposits after the election results were declared on Saturday.

Out of the 699 candidates in the fray, 555 forfeited their deposits in the 5 February polls. The Congress not only drew a blank in terms of seats for a third time in a row, but 67 of its 70 candidates lost their deposits. *—PTI*

BJP'S VOTE SHARE RISES BY 13%, AAP FALLS BY 10%

BJP's vote share in Delhi has grown by nearly 13 per cent in the last 10 years while the AAP's vote share has declined by nearly 10 per cent during the same period. In the keenly contested Assembly polls in Delhi, there was a difference of only two per cent between the vote shares of the BJP and AAP. The saffron party has stormed to power in the national capital by winning 48 of the 70 seats restricting AAP to 22 seats. The BJP not only swept the AAP but also ensured that its heavyweights, including chief Arvind Kejriwal, had to taste defeat. *—PTI*

BJP to form SIT to probe graft

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

A day after storming to power in Delhi following a gap of more than 26 years, the BJP on Saturday announced to form a Special Investigation Team at the first Cabinet meeting of the new government to probe corruption cases.

Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva said the party has "zero tolerance" for corruption and those involved in scams will be held accountable.

"As Prime Minister Narendra Modi said many times, and so did we, the CAG report will be presented during the first Cabinet meeting. We will also form a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to investigate all corruption cases," Sachdeva said.

Sachdeva also credited Prime Minister Modi and BJP president J P Nadda for guiding the party to success. Meanwhile, the BJP on Sunday sought time for a meeting of the newly elected party MLAs with Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena.

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva wrote to Saxena, seeking an appointment for a meeting with the 48 newly elected party MLAs and seven Lok Sabha MPs from the city. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Kejri asks newly elected AAP MLAs to work for people

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

A day after the AAP was ousted from power in Delhi, party supremo Arvind Kejriwal met its 22 newly elected MLAs at his Ferozshah Road residence.

Addressing reporters after the meeting, outgoing chief minister Atishi, who is among the 22 AAP leaders to weather the BJP storm, said Kejriwal asked them to work for the people and ensure the party plays the role of a constructive opposition and ensure that the saffron party delivers on its promises.

"The AAP will play the role of a constructive opposition and ensure that the BJP pays Rs 2,500 per month to women by 8 March as was promised, provides 300 units of free electricity and continues other facilities for the people," she said, adding that they would ensure that BJP does not discontinue free services. *—PTI*

Cong: Biren's resignation late, now wait for PM's visit

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

Congress on Sunday termed N Biren Singh's resignation from the post of Manipur chief minister as "belated" and said people of the state were now awaiting a visit by "our frequent-flier Prime Minister" Narendra Modi.

The Opposition party's attack came shortly after Singh tendered his resignation to Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla at the Raj Bhavan in Imphal.

AICC general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said the Congress was all set to move a no-confidence motion against Singh and his council of ministers in the Manipur Assembly on Monday.

"The chief minister's resignation was belated. The people of Manipur now await a visit by our frequent-flier prime minister who is off to France and the US now -- and who has found neither the time nor the inclination to go to Manipur these past 20 months," Ramesh said.

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh **PHOTO: PTI**

Singh's resignation came hours after he returned from Delhi.

He urged the central government "to continue the stringent and fool-proof revised mechanism of Free Movement Regime with the biometric being stringently applied time bound and faster border which is underway".

On Saturday, Singh convened a meeting with BJP-led ruling alliance MLAs at the Secretariat.

The meeting was held in the wake of the opposition Congress seeking to move a no-confidence motion against the government.

More than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless since ethnic violence broke out in the state in May 2023. *—PTI*

Human-animal conflict: Priyanka seeks more funds

WAYANAD, 9 FEB

Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra has pledged to urge both the central and state governments to boost funding for addressing human-animal conflict during her visit to the hill constituency. At a meeting with local party leaders in Thiruvambadi Assembly constituency, she highlighted the recent fatalities, including the death of a woman from a tiger attack in Mananthavady, which have raised concerns about safety.

Following discussions with authorities, including the District Magistrate and forest officials, she noted a significant shortage of funds to tackle the issue. "I will pressurise both governments to increase financial support," she announced, adding efforts to secure Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) contributions.

Tomorrow, she will continue her Wayanad visit by meeting booth-level leaders in Wandoor and Nilambur. *—PTI*

TELANGANA CASTE SURVEY

Backward Muslims in BC list 'unjust': Sanjay

HYDERABAD, 9 FEB

Union Minister Bandi Sanjay Kumar has criticised the inclusion of backward Muslims in the Backward Classes (BC) category as part of the caste survey conducted by the Congress government in Telangana, claiming it will be unjust to other backward classes. Speaking at a roadshow in Karimnagar supporting BJP candidates for the upcoming MLC elections, Kumar suggested that this move would hinder Hindu candidates' electoral success in Hyderabad, referencing past local elections where backward Muslims were recognised as BCs and awarded a four per cent reservation under former Chief Minister YS Rajasekhara Reddy.

Kumar further asserted that even Other Castes members oppose the categorisation of Muslims as backward classes. He highlighted discrepancies between previous surveys conducted by the Bharatiya Rashtra Samithi (BRS) and the current Congress survey, noting a significant decline in the proportion of BCs from 51 per cent to 46 per cent.

Bandi Sanjay Kumar. **PHOTO: ANI**

In response, Telangana's Backward Classes Welfare Minister Ponnam Prabhakar convened a meeting with BC association leaders regarding the caste survey report. According to the recently released demographic data, backward classes, excluding Muslim minorities, comprise 46.25 per cent of Telangana's 3.70 crore population. Other groups include Scheduled Castes at 17.43 per cent and Scheduled Tribes at 10.45 per cent. *—PTI*

Parl panel asks MEA to review security at Indian missions

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

A parliamentary panel has recommended that the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) should conduct a "comprehensive security assessment" of all missions and posts of India taking into account the geopolitical situation, potential threats and vulnerabilities in host countries.

The Committee on External Affairs has also noted that India currently lacks resident missions in 42 countries.

While acknowledging the challenges involved in establishing new missions, the committee recommended "accelerating efforts to bridge these gaps, particularly in countries where India has significant economic or strategic interests or a large diaspora presence".

The 'Fourth Report of the Committee on External Affairs on Demands for Grants of the Ministry of External Affairs' was presented in Parliament last week. The panel is headed by Congress MP Shashi Tharoor.

"In view of recent developments, the committee feels that the security of Indian missions and posts abroad is paramount for ensuring the safety of personnel, the protection of sensitive information and the continuity of diplomatic functions."

The MEA has informed the panel that the safety and security of Indian missions and posts is "continuously reviewed". *—PTI*

RESTORATION OF REPUTATION

Milkipur bypoll win eases BJP's wounds

LUCKNOW, 9 FEB

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has celebrated a significant victory in the Milkipur by-election, potentially restoring its reputation after a humiliating loss in the Faizabad Lok Sabha seat eight months prior. This earlier defeat, a sore point for the BJP, occurred in a district seen as a pivotal area for the party's Hindu voter outreach.

Samajwadi Party (SP) chief Akhilesh Yadav had previously flaunted their Faizabad success, placing victorious Dalit MP Awadhesh Prasad prominently in Parliament. However, in a swift turnaround, the BJP restructured its campaign strategy, energising its base with targeted outreach. Party workers hailed the Milkipur victory as an opportunity for "payback" for the previous loss.

Chandrabhanu Paswan, the BJP candidate who won by 61,710 votes, defeated SP's Ajit Prasad **PHOTO: ANI**

Chandrabhanu Paswan, the BJP candidate who won by 61,710 votes, defeated SP's Ajit Prasad in a contest marked by both parties fielding candidates from the Pasi Dalit subcaste. This win is seen as a crucial course correction ahead of the 2024 elections, following SP allegations aimed at the BJP regarding reservations for Dalits and OBCs.

The BJP adopted a more inclusive approach, distributing copies of the Constitution as part of its 'Samvidhan Gaurav Samman' initiative, aiming to reconnect with the Dalit community. UP BJP secretary Abhijat Mishra remarked that the election results affirm the party's commitment to these communities. *—PTI*

Forged president's release order sent to UP jail; FIR filed

SAHARANPUR, 9 FEB

An FIR has been registered at UP's Janakpuri police station after the Saharanpur district jail received a forged order, purportedly issued in the name of the president of India, to release a murder accused, officials said on Sunday. Senior jail superintendent Satyaprakash initiated a probe into the matter, which confirmed that the order was fraudulent. The fake order was issued for the release of an inmate named Ajay, who is facing trial in a murder case, he said. Taking the matter seriously, the jail authorities informed the police. Subsequently, an FIR was lodged at the Janakpuri police station on Friday against unknown persons. The probe is underway. *—PTI*

PHOTO: REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE

Three held with ₹40 cr cocaine at Delhi airport

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

Three foreign nationals have been arrested for smuggling cocaine worth nearly Rs 40 crore at the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) airport here, the customs department said on Sunday. The accused – two Brazilian women and a Kenyan man – who had ingested cocaine-filled capsules were arrested in separate cases, it said. In the first case, a 26-year-old Brazilian passenger was intercepted after her arrival from Sao Paulo via Paris on 28 January. During her stay at the hospital, she eased out 98 capsules which resulted in the recovery of 866 grams of cocaine, estimated to be valued at Rs 12.99 crore. The seized drugs, weighing 802 grams, have an estimated street value of Rs 12.03 crore, it said. *—PTI*

Ban on liquor, non-veg food in Katra extended

JAMMU, 9 FEB

Authorities have extended by two more months the ban on the sale, possession and consumption of liquor and non-vegetarian food in Katra, the base camp for pilgrims visiting Mata Vaishno Devi shrine in Jammu and Kashmir's Reasi district, officials said on Sunday. The prohibition will be enforced on the 12-km track from Katra to the holy cave on the Trikuta hill and adjoining areas, they said and added that the order would remain in force for two months from the date of its issuance, unless revoked earlier. Katra sub-divisional magistrate Piyush Dhotra has prohibited the sale, possession and consumption of liquor and non-vegetarian food, under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, the officials said. *—PTI*

Three killed as mini truck collides with SUV in MP

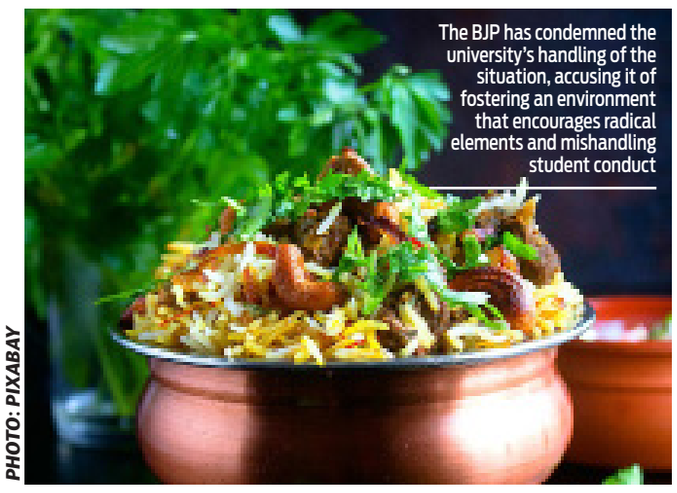
SATNA, 9 FEB

Three people were killed and 10 others injured when a mini truck carrying pilgrims to Prayagraj for the Maha Kumbh collided with an SUV in Madhya Pradesh's Satna district on Sunday, police said. The truck overturned after the collision which took place at around 1.30 am on Satna-Chitrakoot state highway, located 45 km from the district headquarters, Majhgawa police station in-charge Aditya Narayan Dhurve said. The incident led a traffic jam on the road which was later cleared by police. The deceased were occupants of the pickup truck (mini truck), which was carrying people from Jabalpur in MP to Prayagraj in Uttar Pradesh to attend the ongoing Maha Kumbh, the official said. The people in the sports utility vehicle (SUV) were going to Damoh after returning from Prayagraj via Chitrakoot, he said. *—PTI*

'Beef biryani' notice at AMU sparks controversy

AMU admin clarified the notice contained a 'typing error'

ALIGARH, 9 FEB



The BJP has condemned the university's handling of the situation, accusing it of fostering an environment that encourages radical elements and mishandling student conduct

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) is at the centre of a controversy following the circulation of a notice suggesting that 'beef biryani' would be served for lunch at Sir Shah Sulaiman Hall on Sunday, replacing chicken biryani. The notice, reportedly issued by two individuals claiming to be authorised, quickly gained traction on social media, sparking widespread uproar among students and the broader community.

In response to the backlash, the AMU administration clarified that the notice contained a "typing error" and assured that the individuals responsible have been served with show-cause notices. Initially, the administration refrained from commenting on the matter, but as tensions escalated, they issued a statement labelling the notice an "unintentional mistake."

"The matter was brought to our attention regarding the food menu. However, it was clear that the notice contained a typing error and was immediately withdrawn due to the absence of official signatures, raising doubts about its validity," a university spokesperson explained.

The administration's response has been met with criticism from some quarters. BJP leader and AMU alumnus Nishit Sharma condemned the university's handling of the situation, accusing it of fostering an environment that encourages radical elements and mishandling student conduct. He stated that the notice's public display represented a serious lapse in the responsibilities of senior food committee members.

The incident has highlighted sensitivities around food choices in diverse university environments, prompting calls for better communication and oversight within the institution. *—PTI*

India shares a 4,096km border with Bangladesh, of which 2,217km is in West Bengal

PHOTO: ANI

Radio signals caught along B'desh border

KOLKATA, 9 FEB

Amateur Ham Radio operators have reported picking up suspicious late-night radio signals in coded Bengali, Urdu, and Arabic along the Indo-Bangladesh border in South Bengal over the past two months, raising alarms about potential extremist activities, officials revealed.

The signals were first detected in December, with transmissions originating from Basirhat and Bongaon in North 24 Parganas, as well as regions in the Sunderbans. Concerned operators alerted the Ministry of Communications, which forwarded the matter to Kolkata's International Monitoring Station for investigation.

"We have monitored these suspicious signals typically between 1am and 3am," said Ambarish Nag Biswas, secretary of the West Bengal Radio Club.

"Whenever we requested identification, the signals would cease."

Security agencies have been informed, with officials acknowledging the seriousness of the situation, stating that unidentified communications along the border warrant investigation.

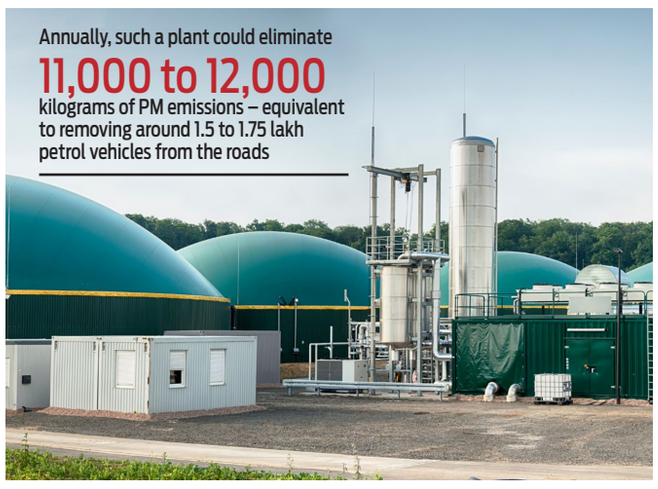
History suggests that Ham radio frequencies have been exploited by smugglers and extremist groups due to their relative difficulty to monitor compared to conventional communication methods.

Previous instances of suspicious transmissions have been recorded, including arrests of six extremists operating illegal radio stations in 2002-03 and alarming signals detected before communal clashes in Basirhat in 2017.

India shares a 4,096-km border with Bangladesh, of which 2,217 km is in West Bengal, a region known for its porous boundary. *—PTI*

Compressed biogas a sustainable solution to Delhi's pollution: Study

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB



Annually, such a plant could eliminate **11,000 to 12,000** kilograms of PM emissions – equivalent to removing around 1.5 to 1.75 lakh petrol vehicles from the roads

Beyond reducing pollution, CBG serves as a renewable fuel, substituting fossil-based fuels in various applications

PHOTO: X

A recent report by Nomura Research Institute Consulting & Solutions India highlights compressed biogas (CBG) as a viable solution to Delhi's pollution crisis, addressing both stubble burning and vehicular emissions. The report reveals that vehicles contribute 20 per cent to the city's pollution in the summer, while stubble burning accounts for 16 per cent. These figures soar during winter, escalating to 30 per cent and 23 per cent respectively.

During peak stubble-burning season, emissions can exceed 30 per cent, with a significant portion of particulate matter (PM) originating from neighbouring Punjab and Haryana.

The report suggests that a CBG plant producing 10 tonnes of CBG daily would require approximately 90 tonnes of paddy straw, preventing around 270 kilograms of PM emissions each day.

Annually, such a plant could eliminate 11,000 to 12,000 kilograms of PM emissions—equivalent to removing around 1.5 to 1.75 lakh petrol vehicles from the roads.

Beyond reducing pollution, CBG serves as a renewable fuel, substituting fossil-based fuels in various applications.

The report emphasises the need for coordinated efforts involving government, private sectors, and farmers to promote CBG adoption, alongside necessary policy incentives and infrastructure development. *—PTI*

Attempt to derail train foiled near Raebareli

RAEBARELI, 9 FEB

An attempt to derail a train near Raebareli was foiled after the loco pilot spotted stones placed on tracks near the Champa Devi Temple and applied emergency brakes, officials said.

The incident prompted immediate action from railway officials, who alerted the local police and the Government Railway Police.

Officials said unidentified individuals placed large stones on the railway tracks at a bridge near the temple.

The bridge has a standard 450mm gap between the guard rail and the running rail, where the stones were kept on Saturday night, police said.

The alert loco pilot of the Yesvantpur Express, approaching from Lucknow, noticed the obstruction. As the train was already slowing down due to a red signal, he was able to apply the emergency brakes in time, officials said. *—PTI*

Seers perform the Kadhi Pakora ritual at the ongoing Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj

PHOTO: ANI

4 killed as dumper truck falls on them in Guj

PALANPUR, 9 FEB

Three women labourers and a toddler were crushed to death when a dumper truck carrying sand overturned and fell on them in Gujarat's Banaskantha district, police said on Sunday.

The incident occurred at Khengarpura village on Saturday evening when a group of labourers was engaged in road construction work, they said.

The dumper tried to make its way through a narrow passage and overturned, falling on three women engaged in the road construction work, Deputy Superintendent of Police SM Varotariya said.

A child belonging to a labourer's family also died in the incident, he said.

It took nearly two hours to pull out the women and the child trapped under the truck, officials said. The four people were then rushed to a government hospital where they were declared dead, the officials said. Nearly 10 labourers were engaged at the site where the accident occurred, Tharad police inspector RR Rathwa said. The dumper driver was detained and an FIR is being filed against him, he added. *—PTI*

The dumper truck overturned which overturned in Banaskantha district of Gujarat on Sunday

PHOTO: PTI

True devotees reject Kumbh glamour, says akhara head

MAHAKUMBH NAGAR, 9 FEB

A faction of sadhus has voiced their discontent regarding the rising focus on viral personalities at the Maha Kumbh, asserting that it detracts from the festival's true essence of spirituality and devotion. Mahant Dharmendra Das, head of Udasin Akhara Bandhua Kala Cantonment, emphasised, "Mahakumbh is not a hub of glamour but a centre for sadhus, devotees, and the Sanatan faith."

Since the event commenced last month, numerous influencers and celebrities, including model-turned-sadhvi Harsha Richaria and actor Mamata Kulkarni, have gained attention, leading to questions about the media's responsibility in promoting them over genuine devotees. "Many come to the Sangam for their faith and true salvation," Das remarked, highlighting the humble experience of devotees who spend nights under the stars rather than seeking luxury. The UP government has counted 39 crore pilgrims to date. *—PTI*

FIRE BREAKS OUT IN MAHA KUMBH TENT, PILGRIMS SAFE

MAHAKUMBH NAGAR, 9 FEB

A fire erupted in a 'kalpvasi' tent in Sector 19 at the Maha Kumbh on Sunday, caused by a leak from a gas cylinder, officials reported. Firefighters swiftly extinguished the blaze within 10 minutes, and fortunately, no injuries were noted.

Chief Fire Officer (Kumbh) Pramod Sharma confirmed that the tent, belonging to Rajendra Jaiswal from Karma, Prayagraj, was set up by the Om Prakash Pandey Seva Sansthan and was completely destroyed.

This incident marks one of three major fires at the Maha Kumbh, alongside numerous smaller blazes.

On 7 February, a fire affected the ISKCON camp, damaging around 20 tents, while 19 January saw a cylinder blast destroying over a dozen camps. *—PTI*

Kerala's land tax anti-farmer: Archbishop

KANNUR, 9 FEB

A Catholic Archbishop strongly criticised the Left government in Kerala for its decision to increase land tax in the recently presented state budget and described the move as "anti-farmer".

Thalassery Archbishop Mar Joseph Pamplani said on Sunday if the Finance Minister sees increasing tax on agricultural land as a major source of revenue, it shows that the state administration does not respect farmers.

He also accused the government of squeezing the farmers to increase the salary of its employees and charged that the stand adopted by the authorities in this regard was "anti-farmer".

To generate more funds to make up the deficit of over Rs 27,000 crore in its planned expenditure, the Vijayan government proposed to increase land tax rates by 50 per cent, levy lifetime road tax on electric vehicles based on their cost, increase road tax on over 15-year-old private vehicles by 50 per cent and revise court fees. *—PTI*

OFFICIAL APATHY

NGT slams authorities over illegal felling of 980 trees in Noida

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

- A bench of NGT Chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava said action had only been taken against persons on two vehicles transporting timber from the illegally cut trees

The National Green Tribunal has observed that the illegal felling of 980 trees in Greater Noida was not taken seriously by the Uttar Pradesh authorities, and asked the principal chief conservator of forest to appear virtually before it on 13 May to apprise it on the action taken.

The green body was hearing a plea alleging unauthorised felling of a large number of trees in Greater Noida's DCM (Daewoo Motors) company premises which had been shut for the last 22 years.

Observing that a significant number of trees have been cut, a bench of NGT Chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava said that after an inspection by the forest officers, 980 trees were found to be cut and that action had only been taken against two vehicles transporting timber from the illegally cut trees.

The tribunal noted the replies of the authorities concerned and said "adequate action" had not been taken to trace those responsible for the illegal felling of 980 trees or to recover the timber.

"There appears to be a lapse on the part of the authorities in this matter. Based on the manner in which the counsel for the state (of UP) is responding to the tribunal's queries, we gathered the issue related to the felling of 980 trees, which is a significant number, has not been taken seriously by the state authorities," the bench said.

The tribunal said the divisional forest officer (DFO) of Gautam Buddha Nagar had filed a separate reply, but instead of disclosing material facts about the efforts to trace the culprits who cut the trees, it said there was a lapse on the part of two private security guards in protecting the sealed gate. All the reports before it revealed "unsatisfactory efforts" in the matter, the tribunal said. *—PTI*

A report by the divisional forest officer of Gautam Buddha Nagar only mentioned a lapse on the part of two private security guards in protecting the sealed gate

PHOTO: PIXABAY

GERMANY BRACES FOR ELECTIONS

People gather to take part in a rally against right-wing extremism, ahead of the country's general election in Munich, Germany. The protest was supported by activist groups as well as the Munich Film Festival, churches and Munich football clubs FC Bayern and TSV 1860. ***PHOTO: PTI***

Former allies slam Kejriwal for shift in stance

Aam Aadmi Party's loss in the Delhi polls on Saturday triggered sharp reactions from Arvind Kejriwal's former colleagues in the party and in the 2011 India Against Corruption (IAC) movement who blamed his shift from the idea of providing an alternative politics for the defeat.

Maharashtra based activist Anna Hazare, who led the 2011 anti-corruption movement for a Jan Lokpal bill that brought the then ruling United Progressive Alliance (UPA) to the negotiation table blamed the liquor scam for AAP's defeat.

Hazare, who was against forming a political party, parted ways with his protege Kejriwal after he formed AAP in 2012 following the movement.

"With the liquor policy issue came money and they drowned in it. The image was tarnished. People saw Kejriwal talking about clean character and then about liquor," he told reporters in Ralegan Siddhi village.

Hazare said AAP failed to understand the need to serve people selflessly and took the wrong path. "Money took the front seat which dented AAP's image, leading to its defeat," he said. "I have been saying this since the beginning that when one contests polls, the candidate's character should be clean and spotless. The candidate should know the virtues of sacrifice and should have the capacity to tolerate insults."

Swaraj India party co-founder and psephologist Yogendra Yadav, one of the founding members of AAP, expelled from the party in 2015, termed the party's loss a setback for all those who dreamt of alternative politics.

"This is a setback not just for the AAP but all those who dreamt of alternative politics. It is a setback for all the parties which supported AAP and for the entire opposition in the country," Yadav told PTI.

Yadav claimed the AAP gave up on alternative politics after coming to power and got restricted to welfare schemes that reached a saturation point.

Delhi BJP President Adesh Gupta and party leader Parvesh Verma during a protest over alleged corruption in the implementation of the new excise policy ***PHOTO: ANI***

Poet-politician Kumar Vishwas, who was with the IAC movement and one of the founding members of AAP, said he was happy and sad at the same time over the party's loss.

"Sad because 13 years ago, a wave of political renaissance had swept across India in which seeds of alternative politics were hidden," Vishwas said.

In a no-holds-barred attack on Kejriwal, he said, "A shameless, narcissistic, insecure person played the part of Duryodhan and caused this downfall."

"This is their first defeat. For the crime of murdering the dreams of crores of innocent people, they will be punished," Vishwas said and urged the AAP workers to "think about their future since there is no way for the party to bounce back."

Former Delhi Commission for Women chief and Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal, also been a part of the anti-corruption movement, had left AAP last year after allegedly being beaten up at Kejriwal's residence, said people have punished the party for its arrogance.

"The people of Delhi saw how the city turned into a garbage bin. People are not getting water, Yamuna is dirty, and air pollution is high. There was anger among people," she said. "In the last 10 years, they showed people dreams but could not fulfil them. They got me beaten up, slandered me; today people taught him a lesson and he could not save his own seat."

Shazia Ilmi, another founder member of the party who quit and went to the BJP in 2014, said those who gathered in the Ramlila ground for the anti-corruption movement had dreamt of a new kind of politics.

"I am absolutely delighted and also emotional. All of us gathered in the Ramlila ground wanted a new kind of politics. But what did Delhi see? It got a charlatan who brought Delhi down," she said. "This is a man who actually caused a loss of Rs 260 crore to the exchequer, this is the man who lived in 'Sheesh Mahal', and this is the man who became AAPda (disaster) himself," she said.

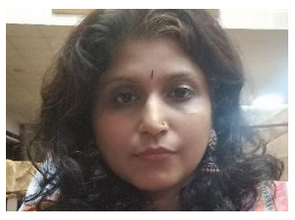
Activist Anjali Damania, who was the convener of the Maharashtra unit of AAP and quit the party in 2015, said "Today, an ideology was defeated."

The BJP has returned to power in Delhi after more than 26 years, in another big win to stamp its saffron footprint. *—PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR

The cost of the American dream: Borderless apathy



VINODHINI

The lure of the dollar seems to overpower the allure of the native home. According to World Migration report conducted by UN in 2022, 17.9 million Indians born here are living abroad, making it the world's largest diaspora. But for the 104 Indians who returned home shackled, their American dream broken, adversity has hit twice. They now have to pay off a loan they took to migrate, for a job that never was. They also have to now live with the memories of their fellow mates dying and left behind as they made the arduous journey with little or no food.

How many people died taking the "dunki" route? Like the epidemic that just passed, we don't have a count.

Why should we keep count?

Many states have woken up to the reality of precious human resource migrating abroad for better money and prospects. However, Indian workers work abroad sometimes in perilous conditions and exploitative circumstances. Some states like Tamil Nadu and Kerala are actively encouraging their state citizens abroad to register with their state portals to be able to seek help if necessary. Tamil Nadu Government is offering loans to returnees to start businesses so their new found confidence due to experience, will not go wasted. Andhra Pradesh and Telangana are just waking up to the need to have a registry of their own with Telugu speaking students topping the list in student visas. Maharashtra Government through a tie up with countries like Germany is opening skill development centres to train and send semi-skilled labourers abroad. State Governments have realized that increased per capita income through remittances in the state contributes to a growing economy.

However, for those who are victims of fraud by unregistered agents, help still eludes them. They neither have the agency nor the means to complain and seek justice. Treating them like criminals and calling them illegal aliens only dehumanizes and revictimises them.

What else should Governments do?

Lack of opportunities locally, poor quality of education and social pressure has made some states than others a huge market for greedy agents supported by a well-entrenched local and international network. They manage to entice them promising a bigger dream and swindle them of huge amounts of money to migrate. Merely a crackdown of the network is not enough. State and Central Government should have outreach programmes to raise awareness about the perils of trusting unauthorized agents and travelling through invalid visas. They should increase legal migration by training workers and having more tie ups with other countries requiring skilled and semi-skilled workforce. Having regulated - monitored migration facilitated by the Central Government will ensure their rights are protected even when they are abroad.

The Indian Government should stand up for those trying to enter US illegally to be sent back home with dignity. But there is a greater question here. It is also answerable to its citizens as to why it is not able to provide better opportunities here. With European countries and US increasingly tightening the noose on immigration it has become more important for jobs to be created back home.

Intent without investment

At the moment, our budgetary allocation for education and health is just approximately at 3.35 percent of the entire budget. If the dream of a "Viksit bharat" or even a middle income economy is to be achieved, higher investment in skill building and increasing employability is crucial. A robust public healthcare that tells our workforce that it supports us during testing times is essential. Increased investment in research is needed to propel us to come up with products that can be exported to the world. Quality education that is humane and inclusive should be made accessible to poor students also. They will become the engine of the country's growth by contributing to both government and private institutions in scientific research and economic development.

After all, it is not enough to dream of a future but it is important to invest in it.

The writer is a former journalist, language tutor, life-skills counsellor and a lawyer based in Chennai.

Deported immigrants brought to Ahmedabad after being arrested in the US ***PHOTO: PTI***

US-deported Indians reflect on their journey, lament their future

Harwinder Singh had time to reflect during a 40-hour journey on a US military transport plane from Texas to the city of Amritsar, Punjab state.

The flight was the last chapter of an ordeal that began in June 2024 after Singh paid an agent over 4 million rupees for passage to the United States. The agent had assured the 41-year-old from Punjab that he would reach the US legally in two weeks.

"But instead, I traveled through Qatar, Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Panama, Nicaragua and Mexico, sometimes under precarious conditions, hoping to reach the US, the land of opportunity," Singh told DW.

Singh's agent had facilitated his travel through the so-called "donkey route." The term is used in India to describe illegal and risky migration routes used by people attempting to enter the US or other Western countries without proper documentation, typically involving multiple stops in different countries.

Harwinder Singh left India in June 2024 in an attempt to reach the US.

Singh said he and other migrants lived on a subsistence diet while often walking through rugged terrain and in rough weather conditions. In one instance, he and a group of migrants were put in a small boat into the sea toward Mexico, and during the journey, one person fell off the boat without a life jacket and could not be saved.

"I saw another die in the Panama jungle," said Singh.

Singh was caught in Mexico just before crossing into the US in late January, and was handed over to the US Border Patrol and held in a detention center.

He was eventually put in handcuffs and shackles on a military aircraft and sent back to India along with over 100 deportees from Punjab, Gujarat, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra states.

The others on the deportation flight included 19 women and 13 minors, among them a 4-year-old boy and two girls aged 5 and 7.

"I feel devastated after risking everything, money, safety, and even my dignity, in the hope of securing a better future for my family abroad," said Singh, a father of two children.

The Washington-based Pew Research Center, citing the latest data from 2022, estimates that approximately 725,000 unauthorized immigrants from India reside in the US. That would make them the third-largest group after Mexico and El Salvador.

The deportation of Indian nationals has brought attention to the challenges that many face when they attempt to migrate ***PHOTO: PTI***

However, data from the Migration Policy Institute estimates that in 2022 there were 375,000 unauthorized immigrants from India in the US, making them the fifth-largest group.

Nevertheless, India and the US have been negotiating deportations for a long time. In 2024, the US identified nearly 18,000 undocumented Indian migrants to be sent back home, according to an exclusive Bloomberg report.

The deportation of Indian nationals has brought attention to the challenges that many face after returning. Many have spent all of their savings attempting to reach the US.

"It is going to be difficult, and I cannot think ahead. The saving grace is my husband is back, but the debts are crushing," said Kuljinder Kaur, Harwinder Singh's wife.

"For now, we want to be left alone. Let us heal collectively," she said.

Akashdeep Singh, who was also on the deportation flight, told DW he risked both his finances and his family's emotional well-being for a chance to live in the US. The 23-year-old from a village near Amritsar sold huge tracts of land and took loans amounting to 6 million rupees to fund his trip.

About eight months before his deportation, he went to Dubai with the hope of working as a truck driver. However, the job fell through, and he then decided to go to the US through an agent, who left him in the lurch.

"I was arrested in January. It was horrible, and I do not want to get into the details, but the shame is what I must carry and cannot forget," said Singh.

"Don't ask me about what motivated me to make such a risky decision," he added.

The deportations from the US to India earlier this week were part of a broader crackdown on irregular migration under US President Donald Trump, who has made deportations a political priority. However, the use of US military planes for the first time instead of regular commercial flights for deporting the 104 Indian nationals has carried a strong symbolic and political message.

The flight also comes ahead of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's much anticipated visit to Washington. This move has sparked criticism from opposition parties in India, who are questioning both the timing and the treatment of the deportees by US authorities.

In a statement in the Parliament, Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said that the "use of restraints" during deportation flights was carried out according to US standard operating procedures, and New Delhi was engaging with Washington to ensure that deportees were not mistreated, after the opposition's raised concerns over the use of handcuffs and shackles.

Akashdeep Singh's father, Swaran Singh, 55, told DW while waiting for his son at Amritsar airport that despite facing a massive financial burden, having his son return home safely is all that matters.

"The agent promised me it would be a safe trip. I trusted him, but now everything is lost," he said. "The harsh reality, like everywhere in the country is that we face financial ruin and social stigma, especially when our family members return in this fashion." *—DW News*

PHOTO: X

Remains of all 10 Alaska plane crash victims recovered

JUNEAU, 9 FEB

The remains of all 10 people killed when a the Bering Air plane crashed into ice on the Bering Sea have been recovered, authorities said. The Nome Volunteer Fire Department made the announcement on its Facebook page Saturday afternoon. Recovery crews had been racing to recover the bodies before a winter storm was expected to hit the region. The single-engine turboprop plane was travelling from Unalakleet to the hub community of Nome when it disappeared Thursday afternoon. It was found the next day after an extensive search with all nine passengers and the pilot dead, making it one of the deadliest plane crashes in the state in 25 years. The aircraft is on an ice floe that is drifting about 8km a day. *—PTI*

Kim Jong Un slams US, South Korea & Japan partnership

SEOUL, 9 FEB

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said an elevated US security partnership with South Korea and Japan poses a grave threat to his country and vowed to further bolster his nuclear weapons programme, state media reported Sunday. Kim has previously made similar warnings, but his latest statement implies again that the North Korean leader won't likely embrace President Donald Trump's overture to meet him and revive diplomacy anytime soon. Kim said the US-Japan-South Korea trilateral security partnership established under a US plot to form a NATO-like regional military bloc is inviting military imbalance on the Korean Peninsula and "raising a grave challenge to the security environment of our state," according to the official Korean Central News Agency. *—PTI*

Death of 15 birds at NY City zoos sparks avian flu scare

NEW YORK, 9 FEB

At least three and possibly up to 15 birds have died of avian flu at two New York City zoos, according to the organisation that operates the facilities. The Wildlife Conservation Society said three ducks at the Queens Zoo died after contracting the virus, and lab tests are pending on three ducks and nine wild birds that died at the Bronx Zoo after possible exposure. "As a precaution, over the last two weeks, we have moved vulnerable bird species to protected areas in our parks," officials said in a statement. On Friday, state officials ordered bird markets in the metropolitan area to close for a week after seven cases of avian flu were detected in the Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens. *—PTI*

Violence-hit Ecuador votes for new president

GUAYAQUIL, 9 FEB

Ecuador's presidential election on Sunday is shaping up to be a repeat of the 2023 race, when voters chose a conservative young millionaire over the leftist protege of the country's most influential president this century. President Daniel Noboa and Luis González are the clear front-runners among the pool of 16 candidates. All promised voters to reduce the widespread crime that pushed their lives into an unnerving new normal four years ago. The spike in violence across Ecuador is tied to the trafficking of cocaine produced in neighbouring Colombia and Peru. So many voters have become crime victims that their personal and collective losses will be a determining factor in deciding whether a third president in four years can turn Ecuador around or if Noboa deserves more time in office. *—PTI*

Putin wants Ukraine war to end: Trump

Trump said he has a concrete plan to end the conflict, which has entered its third year

WASHINGTON, 9 FEB

US President Donald Trump has said he had held a phone call with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, discussing efforts to end the Moscow-Kyiv war, according to The New York Post.

Speaking to The Post on Friday, Trump declined to specify how many times the two leaders had spoken but insisted that Putin is eager to see an end to the conflict.

"He wants to see people stop dying," Trump said. "Two million of them – and for no reason."

Trump asserted that the war, now in its third year, "never would have happened" if he had been the president in 2022. He contrasted his foreign policy approach with that of his predecessor Joe Biden, saying, "Biden was an embarrassment to our nation. A complete embarrassment."

The president expressed urgency in resolving the war and emphasised he has a concrete plan to bring it to a close. "I hope it's fast. Every day people are dying. This war is so bad in Ukraine. I want to end this damn thing."

Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump attend a meeting on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Osaka, Japan, on Friday *PHOTO: ANI*

Along with National Security Adviser Mike Waltz aboard Air Force One, Trump pressed for diplomatic talks. "Let's get these meetings going. They want to meet. Every day people are dying. Young handsome soldiers are being killed. Young men, like my sons. On both sides. All over the battlefield."

Meanwhile, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said in Moscow on Sunday that he could "neither confirm nor deny" the report, saying that communication between Russia and the US is carried out through different channels. "Against the background of the multiplicity of these communications, I personally may not know something, be unaware of something," he said. *—Agencies*

Blinken, Sullivan lose security clearances

Donald Trump has revoked the security clearances of Antony Blinken, former Secretary of State, and Jake Sullivan, former National Security Adviser, White House officials announced. This decision follows Trump's recent revocation of security clearance for his predecessor, Joe Biden, effectively ending Biden's access to daily intelligence briefings. Notably, in 2021, President Biden revoked the security clearance of Trump, who was then a former president. *—Agencies*

Trump says he won't deport Prince Harry

US President Donald Trump said that he is "not interested" in deporting Prince Harry, who currently resides in California. "I don't want to do that," Trump said. "I'll leave him alone. He's got enough problems with his wife." Last year in February, Trump had accused former president Joe Biden's administration of protecting Harry. "He betrayed the queen. That's unforgivable," Trump told the UK's Daily Express adding that Harry "would be on his own" if he is re-elected. *—Agencies*

Trump cuts funds to South Africa over 'racial discrimination'

WASHINGTON, 9 FEB

- More than three decades after white rule ended, South Africa remains hugely unequal, with land and wealth largely concentrated among white people

US president Donald Trump has signed an executive order to cut financial assistance to South Africa, accusing the country's government of "unjust racial discrimination" against white Afrikaners and offering them asylum in the US.

The order criticised a law signed by the South African president, Cyril Ramaphosa, last month that allows for land to be expropriated with "nil compensation" in limited circumstances.

Cyril Ramaphosa *PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA*

South Africa was ruled by white Afrikaner leaders during apartheid, which repressed the country's black majority, including forcing them to live in segregated townships and rural "homelands". Afrikaners are descended mainly from the Dutch, who began colonising South Africa in 1652, as well as French Huguenot refugees sponsored by the Dutch.

More than three decades after white rule ended, South Africa remains hugely unequal, with land and wealth still largely concentrated among white people, who make up seven per cent of the population, about half native Afrikaans speakers, while black people are 81 per cent. However, some white South Africans claim they are discriminated against, often citing the country's affirmative action laws.

Trump's executive order, signed on Friday, said there were "countless government policies to dismantle equal opportunity in employment, education, and business, and hateful rhetoric and government actions fuelling disproportionate violence against racially disfavored landowners". *—Agencies*

Musk alleges $100B annual fraud by US Treasury

WASHINGTON DC, 9 FEB

Tesla CEO Elon Musk on Sunday voiced strong concerns about the US government's payment systems, revealing troubling 'inefficiencies' and potential 'fraud' worth over USD 100B every year.

In a post on X, Musk said that the Treasury Department and his Department of Government Efficiency have reached an agreement changing reporting requirements for all outgoing government payments.

The government payments will now have a 'payment categorization code' for auditing purposes, he wrote on X.

Highlighting key reforms that need to be implemented, the Tesla CEO stated, "Require that all outgoing government payments have a payment categorisation code, which is necessary in order to pass financial audits. This is frequently left blank, making audits almost impossible."

Pointing out to USD 100 billion/year to individuals with no Social Security Number (SSN) or temporary ID number, he called it "extremely suspicious."

He called the situation "insane" and urged for immediate action to address the problem of widespread fraud in the system. *—ANI*

The violent mob also demolished the residence of Bangladesh founding father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at Dhanmondi in Dhaka *PHOTO: PTI*

40 held in B'desh for violence, vandalism

DHAKA, 9 FEB

Forty people have been arrested in Bangladesh in an operation launched following a violent attack on a student group's activists during vandalism at an Awami League leader's house on the outskirts of Dhaka that left several people injured, according to a media report.

Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus's government ordered "Operation Devil Hunt" on Saturday after the attack on students and civilians in the Gazipur district on Friday night.

Gazipur Superintendent of Police Chowdhury Jaber Sadek said the 40 people were rounded up from different parts of the district.

On Friday night, at least 14 individuals, all belonging to the mobs out to vandalise and destroy all signs of deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League party, were injured as they came under attack in Gazipur city's Dakshinkhan area. The violence occurred during the attack on the residence of former Liberation War Affairs Minister Mozammel Haque.

In protest, the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement and the National Citizens Committee held a day-long protest and rally in Gazipur. After the protest, a student was injured in a shooting by miscreants in front of the Deputy Commissioner's office around 6:30 pm.

Home Affairs Advisor Md Jahangir Alam Chowdhury has said Operation Devil Hunt will be targeting those who seek to destabilise the country, stressing that the crackdown would continue until the "devils" are brought to book.

The operation is being jointly conducted by the Bangladesh Army, Air Force, and Navy, along with members of the police, Border Guard Bangladesh, Ansar, and Coast Guard.

Jahangir, a former military officer, added that those involved in the recent attacks on students in Gazipur would be brought to justice. *—PTI*

Israel begins force withdrawal from Gaza

TEL AVIV, 9 FEB

An Israeli official on Sunday said that Israeli forces have begun withdrawing from a key Gaza corridor, part of a ceasefire deal with Hamas that is moving ahead.

Israel agreed as part of the truce to remove its forces from the Netzarim corridor, a strip of land that bisects northern Gaza from the south. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to discuss troop movement with the media.

At the start of the ceasefire, Israel began allowing Palestinians to cross Netzarim to head to their homes in the war-battered north and the withdrawal of forces from the area will fulfil another commitment to the deal. It was not clear how many troops Israel had withdrawn on Sunday.

The 42-day ceasefire is just past its halfway point and the sides are supposed to negotiate an extension that would lead to more Israeli hostages being freed from Hamas captivity. But the agreement is fragile and the extension isn't guaranteed.

Soldiers leave Gaza Strip on Sunday *PHOTO: X*

The sides are meant to begin talks on the truce's second stage but there appears to have been little progress.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was sending a delegation to Qatar, a key mediator in talks between the sides, but the mission included low-level officials, sparking speculation that it won't lead to a breakthrough in extending the truce. Netanyahu is expected to convene a meeting of key Cabinet ministers this week on the second phase of the deal, but it was not clear when. *—PTI*

THAI HOSTAGES FREED FROM GAZA REACH BANGKOK

BANGKOK, 9 FEB

Five Thai workers released after being held hostage for over a year in Gaza arrived in Bangkok on Sunday. They were freed on 30 January as part of an exchange arrangement. They were the second batch of Thai hostages released since the war broke out. During an earlier ceasefire in November 2023, 23 Thai nationals were released in a deal negotiated between Thailand and Hamas, with assistance from Qatar and Iran. All five men were assessed at a hospital outside Tel Aviv prior to their return. Four of them were joined by one relative each earlier this week. The trip was sponsored by the Israeli government. Hamas had militants kidnapped 31 Thai nationals during the 7 October, 2023, assault on Israel. *—PTI*

Monkey throws Lanka into darkness for hours

COLOMBO, 9 FEB

Sri Lanka suffered a power outage when a monkey came in contact with the power grid at a Colombo suburb on Sunday, a power grid official said.

The entire grid failed around 11.30am (local time) and the power was restored after several hours, the official said.

Some areas were without for more than five hours, the official said.

"A monkey came into contact with a substation of the power grid at Panadura," Power Minister Kumara Jayakodi told the media.

The state power entity restored power at the national hospital and other key installations after an hour of the outage, the minister said.

The official said people were warned that drinking water supplies could be badly affected.

The Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) said the power cut had been caused by an emergency at a sub-station, south of Colombo, but gave no further details.

- The entire grid failed around 11.30am (local time) and the power was restored after several hours, a power grid official said

Netizens were then able to quickly confirm that the entirety of Colombo, Galle, and several other regions had no power at all.

Many complained about multiple hours long power cuts during the high heat. The temperature in most urban centres in the island nation is north of 30°C.

In some places, like Ratnapura, the high humidity has led to the temperature actually feeling as high as 36°C, said Accuweather. *—PTI*

DRONES, RADARS SEARCH FOR LIFE

1 killed, 28 missing as landslide hits China

BEIJING, 9 FEB

Emergency teams in China's southwestern Sichuan province battled against time Sunday to locate 28 people missing after a rain-triggered landslide killed one person and buried homes.

Nearly 1,000 personnel, including armed police, firefighters and medical professionals, continued to work in the rescue operation following the landslide in the village of Jinping in Junlian county on Saturday.

Some officers navigated through the remains of collapsed buildings, using drones and life-detection radars to locate any signs of life with the help of local officials who were familiar with the area, state broadcaster CCTV said.

Rescue efforts underway at Jinping Village in Junlian County, southwest China's Sichuan Province *PHOTO: X*

They rescued two injured people and evacuated about 360 others after 10 houses and a manufacturing building were buried, CCTV reported.

At a news conference on Sunday, authorities said preliminary assessments attributed the disaster to recent heavy rainfall and local geological conditions. They said these factors transformed a landslide into a debris flow, resulting in an accumulation of debris stretching about 1.2km in length, with a total volume exceeding 100,000 cubic metres.

Chinese Vice Premier Liu Guozhong was at the site to guide the rescue operation and visited the affected residents. He urged authorities to make every effort to search for the missing people, according to official news agency Xinhua. Liu also noted the surrounding slopes still pose collapse risks, calling for scientific assessment to ensure the safety of the operation and prevent another disaster, Xinhua said. *—PTI*

7.6 magnitude earthquake in Caribbean Sea sounds alarm

MEXICO CITY, 9 FEB

- The quake struck at 6.23pm local time in the middle of the sea and had a depth of 10km, the USGS said. Its epicentre was located 209km south–southwest of George Town in the Cayman Islands

A magnitude-7.6 earthquake shook the Caribbean Sea southwest of the Cayman Islands on Saturday, according to the US Geological Survey, and some islands and countries urged people near the coastline to move inland in case of a tsunami.

The quake struck at 6.23pm local time in the middle of the sea and had a depth of 10km, the USGS said. Its epicentre was located 209km south–southwest of George Town in the Cayman Islands.

The US National Tsunami Warning Center said there is no tsunami alert for the US mainland but issued a tsunami advisory for Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands, which was later cancelled.

The sounding of alarms in Puerto Rico's northwest region caused people to leave coastal areas and caused heavy traffic, according to local media. Cayman Islands urged residents near the coast to move inland and to higher ground. *—PTI*

Suzuki strengthens EV charging infra to elevate eVITARA

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

Maruti Suzuki India aims to bolster charging infrastructure in the country before it drives in e VITARA with plans to establish the model as a primary vehicle in a household, according to a senior company executive. The auto major also plans to boost after-sales support, bring in a leasing model and more finance options to encourage customers to buy the model. Currently top 100 cities in the country account for almost 97 per cent of the total EV sales, he stated while elaborating on the plan. As per the industry figures, electric passenger vehicles in the country today are mostly bought as a second or third vehicle in a household. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

OYO PAT rises nearly 6 times to Rs 166 crore in Q3

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

Travel tech unicorn OYO recorded a profit after tax (PAT) of Rs 166 crore in the third quarter ended December, up nearly six times from Rs 25 crore in the year-ago period, sources said. The company's revenue in the third quarter rose to Rs 1,695 crore, growing almost 31 per cent from Rs 1,296 crore a year earlier, marking a turnaround from the flat topline growth seen in FY24. According to documents accessed by PTI, the company achieved an adjusted EBITDA of Rs 249 crore in the October-December period of FY25, registering a 22 per cent increase from Rs 205 crore a year ago. For the first nine months of FY25, OYO reported a PAT of Rs 457 crore, compared to a loss of Rs 111 crore in the same period last year, as per its provisional financials. *—PTI*

Bajaj Auto to ride into e-rickshaw by end of fiscal

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

Bajaj Auto is gearing up to enter the domestic e-rickshaw segment by the end of this fiscal to tap a 'sizable opportunity' in a fast-growing but highly unorganised market, according to a top company official. The company expects to get regulatory clearances towards the end of the ongoing quarter for its e-rickshaw that will enable it to enter the segment which is about 45,000 units a month, Bajaj Auto Executive Director Rakesh Sharma told analysts. When asked for the exact timeline, Sharma said, "We expect to launch the e-rick by the end of this quarter, let's say, by the end of the FY25 fiscal. By the time all the permissions are through, it may just spill over into the first week of April or retails may spill over to the first week of April or they may just commence by the end of March even. *—PTI*

ESC unveils 'Ignite Tech Startups' programme

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

The Electronics and Computer Software Export Promotion Council (ESC) has announced the 'Ignite Startups' mentoring programme that aims to catalyse the Indian tech startup ecosystem. ESC, in partnership with startup accelerator Marwari Catalysts (MCats), has unveiled a package of funding, global exposure, and mentoring support for innovative tech startups. Marwari Catalysts Founder and CEO Sushil Sharma will serve as the Chief Mentor for the startup programme of ESC and for the startup Pavilion at INDIASOFT 2025 - International IT Exhibition and Conference, scheduled to be held in March 2025. Through this partnership, Marwari Catalysts has earmarked a funding budget of Rs 35 million (Rs 3.5 crore) to nurture 10 to 12 selected tech startups. *—PTI*

FPIs withdraw Rs 7,300 cr from equities in a week

BJP's win in Delhi is likely to positively impact mkt in short run

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

The exodus of FPIs from the Indian equity markets continued unabated, as they withdrew over Rs 7,300 crore (about 840 million) in the first week of this month due to global trade tensions, with the US imposing tariffs on countries such as Canada, Mexico, and China.

This came following an outflow of Rs 78,027 crore in the entire January. Before that, they invested Rs 15,446 crore in December, data with the depositories showed.

Going forward, experts believe that market sentiment will likely take cues from global macroeconomic developments, domestic policy measures, and currency movements.

According to the data, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) offloaded shares worth Rs 7,342 crore from Indian equities so far this month (till 7 February).

PHOTO: X

Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director-Manager Research, Morningstar Investment Research India, said that a key driver of the outflow was global trade tensions, as the United States imposed tariffs on countries including Canada, Mexico, and China, heightening fears of a potential trade war.

Further exacerbating the situation, the Indian rupee depreciated sharply, breaching Rs 87 per US dollar mark for the first time.

The victory of the BJP in the Delhi elections is likely to positively impact the market in the short run. However, the medium to long-term trend in the market will depend on the recovery in GDP growth and earnings recovery, he added.

- On the other hand, FPIs were buyers in the debt market. They put in Rs 1,215 crore into debt general limit and Rs 277 crore in debt voluntary retention route

On the other hand, FPIs were buyers in the debt market. They put in Rs 1,215 crore into debt general limit and Rs 277 crore in debt voluntary retention route.

The overall trend indicates a cautious approach by foreign investors, who scaled back investments in Indian equities significantly in 2024, with net inflows of just Rs 427 crore.

This contrasts sharply with the extraordinary Rs 1.71 lakh crore net inflows in 2023, driven by optimism over economic fundamentals. *—PTI*

ANALYSTS SAY

Mkts to monitor inflation, trends, & FII this week

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

PHOTO:PTI

Investors are poised to closely monitor a series of crucial macroeconomic data releases this week, including inflation figures, as well as global market trends and foreign institutional investor activities, analysts have said.

The ongoing quarterly earnings announcements, together with the rupee-dollar exchange rate dynamics, are expected to significantly influence market movements.

Puneet Singhania, Director of Master Trust Group, stated that this week promises to be pivotal for both global and Indian markets, with fluctuations driven by the release of inflation data, industrial production statistics, and key corporate earnings.

Attention will focus on US inflation data for January set for release this Wednesday, alongside testimony from Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell, which may provide insights into future interest rate expectations. In India, inflation and industrial production data will be unveiled on 12 February. Thursday will see the release of UK GDP growth data, while Friday will bring US retail sales data for January, shedding light on consumer spending trends.

Earnings reports from several major firms, including Eicher Motors and Grasim Industries, are also anticipated to shape market sentiment. *—PTI*

NCLT revokes Logix's insolvency order

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

In an unprecedented ruling, the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) has rescinded its July 2023 order to initiate insolvency proceedings against real estate firm Logix Infrastructure. The NCLT determined that the insolvency petition was filed with "fraudulent and mala fide intentions" by the financial creditor, Experts Realty Professionals.

The tribunal noted a "nexus and connection" between the parties involved and characterised the entire transaction as "orchestrated" for malicious purposes, deviating from the objectives of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC). The NCLT has ordered a thorough investigation by the Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO) into these alleged collusive actions.

PHOTO:X

The tribunal's latest decision mandates an immediate handover of management back to the suspended board of Logix Infrastructure. It also instructed that any resolution plans submitted by bidders should be refunded promptly.

- This ruling followed a plea from allottees of the Logix Blossom Country project, who argued that the original insolvency process was intended to defraud creditors and buyers

This ruling followed a plea from allottees of the Logix Blossom Country project, who argued that the original insolvency process was intended to defraud creditors and buyers.

The NCLT found merit in their claims, raising concerns about the authenticity. *—PTI*

Top 6 firms' Mcap jumps ₹1.18L cr, HDFC leads

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

The combined market valuation of six out of the top ten most valued firms increased by Rs 1,18,151.75 crore last week, driven primarily by strong performances from HDFC Bank and Bharti Airtel, amidst a robust trend in equities.

During the week, the BSE benchmark rose by 354.23 points, or 0.45 per cent, while the Nifty gained 77.8 points, reflecting overall market strength.

Among the top ten firms, Reliance Industries, HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank, Infosys, and Bajaj Finance reported gains, while Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), State Bank of India, Hindustan Unilever, and ITC experienced declines. Collectively, these four companies saw a valuation drop of Rs 1.15 lakh crore.

PHOTO:ANI

HDFC Bank's market capitalisation surged by Rs 32,639.98 crore to Rs 13,25,090.58 crore, while Bharti Airtel added Rs 31,003.44 crore, bringing its valuation to Rs 9,56,205.34 crore. Bajaj Finance rose by Rs 29,032.08 crore to Rs 5,24,312.82 crore, and Infosys climbed by Rs 21,114.32 crore to Rs 7,90,074.08 crore.

Conversely, ITC's valuation fell by Rs 39,474.45 crore, and Hindustan Unilever's market capitalisation dropped by Rs 33,704.89 crore. Reliance Industries remains the most-valued domestic firm, followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, and Bharti Airtel. *—PTI*

Bengal foundry sector to get ₹2K cr investment

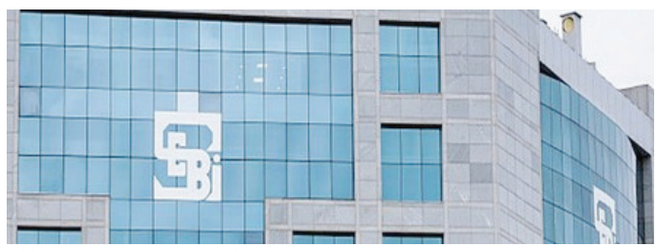
KOLKATA, 9 FEB

The foundry industry in West Bengal is set to attract a Rs 2,000 crore investment aimed at new and brownfield expansions to enhance capacity amid rising cost pressures and shifting demand trends, announced an official on Sunday.

Navneet B Agarwal, president of the Institute of Indian Foundrymen (IIF), revealed that the state's growth rate is currently 50 per cent higher than the national average. MSMEs will contribute Rs 400 crore of the total investment, which includes both large and MSME foundry expansions and greenfield projects.

Despite challenges stemming from a slowdown in the automotive sector, Agarwal noted that eastern India remains largely insulated due to demand from railways, ductile pipes, exports, and defence. *—PTI*

PUBLIC FEEDBACK OPEN



SEBI aims to enhance the ASCR to provide clearer confirmation of compliance with securities laws and make it a mandatory component of annual reports *PHOTO: ANI*

SEBI considers compliance & auditor rules change

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has unveiled proposals aimed at bolstering corporate governance among listed companies. Key changes include a revised format for the Annual Secretarial Compliance Report (ASCR), new eligibility criteria for auditor appointments, and the establishment of monetary thresholds for approvals related to Related Party Transactions (RPTs).

In a consultation paper released on Friday, SEBI aims to enhance the ASCR to provide clearer confirmation of compliance with securities laws and make it a mandatory component of annual reports. It has proposed that the audit committee assess the qualifications and experience of statutory auditors to ensure they align with the complexity and size of the listed entity.

Furthermore, SEBI seeks to impose financial thresholds for RPTs undertaken by subsidiary firms, proposing a set monetary cap based on the subsidiaries' financial performance. For those without a track record, a threshold of 10 per cent of the net worth will apply, with specific limits for main-board and SME-listed subsidiaries.

SEBi is inviting public feedback on these proposals until 28 February, reflecting its commitment to improving compliance and transparency in the corporate sector. *—PTI*

Increase in MSME financing will boost biogas: IBA

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

Indian Biogas Association (IBA) on Sunday said the proposed increase in MSME financing in the General Budget 2025 is a right step to boost biogas industry.

With a strong push for manufacturing, green energy, and digital transformation, this Budget sets the stage for Aatmanirbhar and Viksit Bharat, an IBA statement said.

From the standpoint of the fledgling biogas/CBG (compressed biogas) industry, the announced increase to the MSME Credit Guarantee Scheme will significantly benefit the biogas industry, which often faces challenge in securing credit with reasonable terms, it noted.

By expanding the credit guarantee cover from Rs 5-10 crore, the scheme ensures easier access to collateral-free loans, thus reducing financial barriers for the CBG developers, it pointed out.

Tax incentives would yield losses in the short-term, but with CBG producers, about 100 commercial plants generating Rs 1,200 crore in FY25, there will be long-term benefits. *—PTI*

Govt partners with Amazon, others to expand bamboo industry

CHENNAI, 9 FEB

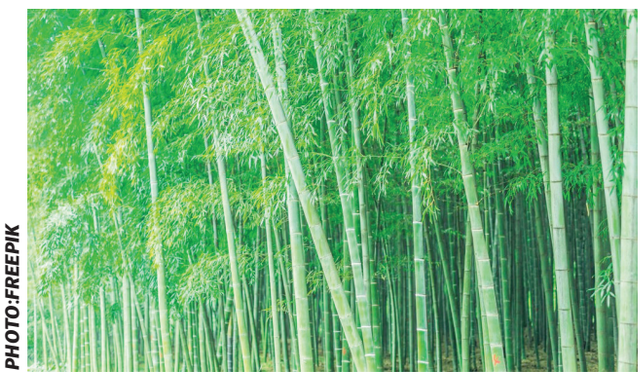


PHOTO:FREEPIK

The Ministry of Development of North East Region would explore the market opportunities for Bamboo in domestic and overseas markets and it was working with Amazon and two other companies in this connection, a senior government official has said.

Besides promoting Bamboo locally, the Ministry would also look for shipping them to neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Myanmar, Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (MDoNER) Secretary Chanchal Kumar said.

At a recent roadshow in Chennai, Union Minister for Communications and Development of North Eastern Region Jyotiraditya M Scindia said nearly 38 per cent of the Bamboo was produced in the North Eastern States. This provides a huge opportunity for Chennai which has a huge furniture-making industry, he said.

In a brief interaction with PTI, the Ministry's Secretary Chanchal Kumar said the government intends to promote Bamboo products in both domestic and overseas markets.

Elaborating on the initiative he said that after the companies entered into a tie-up with the ministry, it (the ministry) will help the companies to market the products easily. *—PTI*

SAYS CBIC CHIEF

Gold smuggling drops after July duty cut

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

Gold smuggling into India has seen a considerable decline since the government reduced the import duty on the precious metal to 6 per cent in July 2024, according to Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) Chairman Sanjay Kumar Agarwal.

Latest data indicates that Customs and Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) officials seized 847 kg of gold valued at Rs 544 crore at airports between April and June of the current fiscal year. Agarwal noted that since the duty reduction from 15 per cent in last year's budget, there has been a marked decrease in gold smuggling activities.

PHOTO:PIXABAY

While he did not specify the amount or value of gold seizures since the duty cut, Agarwal assured that authorities remain vigilant over international passenger traffic, porous borders, and commercial cargoes to combat the smuggling of narcotics and other illicit goods.

The DRI, the primary agency for anti-smuggling operations under the CBIC, reported seizing 1,319 kg of gold during the 2023-24 financial year, with gold smuggling along India's eastern borders, particularly with Bangladesh and Myanmar, raising concerns for enforcement agencies. Overall, a total of 4,869.6 kg of gold was seized by the CBIC in 2023-24, leading to the arrest of 1,922 individuals.

The DRI's December report revealed that India has become a significant destination for illegal gold imports, primarily sourced from Gulf states like the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Smugglers continue to exploit air routes, with recent trends indicating increased activity from airports in Africa and Central Asia. *—PTI*

Indian investors eye Saudi's $63B Diriyah project

NEW DELHI/DAVOS, 9 FEB

Jerry Inzerillo *PHOTO: X*

Several Indian firms have shown a keen interest in investing in Diriyah, a USD 63-billion Saudi Arabian giga project, while some big names like Tatas and Oberois having already signed up, its CEO Jerry Inzerillo said.

Diriyah, being billed as the City of Earth, is being built on the outskirts of Saudi Arabia's capital Riyadh and it will have homes for 100,000 people and office space for a further 100,000 plus.

This new city will include over 40 luxury hotels, more than 1,000 shops, over 150 restaurants and cafes, a university, arts and cultural assets, museums, an opera house, a 20,000-seater multipurpose event arena, a golf course and an international equestrian and polo centre, among other facilities.

The USD 63.2 billion real estate development and tourism project aims to restore the historic birthplace of the modern Saudi kingdom and the site includes the UNESCO World Heritage Site of At-Turaif.

He said India is an important part of their global investment outreach strategy and they have hosted CEOs and founders of prominent companies in India, to showcase Diriyah and Saudi Arabia. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Shuttler Sindhu pulls out of BAMTC 2025

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

Two-time Olympic medallist shuttler PV Sindhu has pulled out of the Badminton Asia Mixed Team Championships in China due to a hamstring issue, dealing a huge blow to the country's chances of improving the color of their medal in the prestigious edition. The tournament is set to be played in Qingdao from February 11-16 with the Indian shuttlers currently undergoing training at a camp in Guwahati. Besides Sindhu, the other leading players in the camp are Lakshya Sen, HS Prannoy, and the formidable doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty. Sindhu was a part of the squad that won bronze in the tournament's previous edition.—*PTI*

Karunaratne retires, ICC praises his commitment

DUBAI, 9 FEB

The International Cricket Council on Sunday lavished praise on former Sri Lankan captain and prolific opener Dimuth Karunaratne, who brought the curtains down on his glittering international career along with his 100th Test against Australia in Galle. Karunaratne scored 36 and 14 in his farewell Test as Australia won the match by nine wickets to make a clean sweep of the two-game series. "Dimuth has had a very fine career during which he excelled as a batter in the most traditional format of the game, becoming only the seventh from his country to feature in 100 Tests," said ICC chairman Jay Shah in a release. Karunaratne, 36, scored 7222 runs in Tests at a healthy average of nearly 40, including a top score of 244. He also played 50 ODIs, scoring 1,316 runs. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

UP Warriorz name Deepti Sharma as captain

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

UP Warriorz on Sunday named seasoned all-rounder Deepti Sharma as their captain for WPL 2025 after regular skipper Alyssa Healy was ruled out of the League because of a foot injury. Warriors will hope that Deepti will repeat her fine WPL 2024 outing, scoring 295 runs in eight innings at a strike rate of 136.57 and an average of 98.33. She had also grabbed 10 wickets with her off-spin at an economy rate of 7.23. The 27-year-old has previous experience in captaincy as well, leading Bengal and East Zone in domestic matches.—*PTI*

FIH Grants Salt Lake stadium category 2 certificate

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

Kolkata has become the latest international hockey venue in India after the Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangana, Salt Lake has been granted a Category 2 certificate by the World Body (FIH) for hosting national and international matches. "Congrats to Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangana, Salt Lake, Kolkata for earning the FIH Category 2 Certificate! A big step forward for hockey excellence," Hockey India posted on 'X'. As per the FIH Field Certification, at the time of the event, the field shall be certified as an FIH Category 1 or Category 2 field. FIH Category 1 fields are designed primarily to host top-level international hockey tournaments, while FIH Category 2 fields are designed to host top-level national tournaments—*PTI*

Rohit's ton guides India to four-wicket win

Shubman Gill also made a fluent 60 off 52 balls

CUTTACK, 9 FEB

Under pressure with questions over form and mounting retirement speculations, skipper Rohit Sharma silenced it all with a vintage 32nd century, firing India to a dominant four-wicket series-clinching victory over England in the second ODI, here on Sunday. Opting to bat on a belter, England was bowled out for 304 in 49.5 overs with left-arm spinner Ravindra Jadeja (3/35) continuing his stranglehold over the visitors.

The 37-year-old Indian skipper made the chase a lopsided affair, returning to his World Cup 2023 best with impeccable timing and effortless stroke-play en route to his 90-ball 119 his century No 32 in ODIs that came just in time ahead of the Champions Trophy in less than two weeks. His 90-ball masterclass, studded with seven sixes and 12 fours, set the tone as India cruised to the target in 44.3 overs to take an unbeatable 2-0 lead going into the final ODI in Ahmedabad on Wednesday. Shubman Gill also made a fluent 60 off 52 balls (9x4, 1x6) but it felt overshadowed in comparison to Rohit in their solid opening partnership of 136 runs their sixth century-plus stand together.

Back after missing out on the Nagpur ODI because of a swollen knee, star batter Virat Kohli (5) fell cheaply edging an Adil Rashid leg-break. Rashid has now got Kohli four times in ODIs.Rohit then had a fruitful 70-run stand with Shreyas Iyer (44) before he was dismissed off a full toss with Rashid taking a fine backward running catch. Iyer soon departed following a runout, while KL Rahul (10) and Hardik Pandya (10) also fell cheaply.

Rohit's knock also saw him surpass (10,987) Rahul Dravid's 10,889 runs to enter the top-10 ODI run-scorers list. He now requires 13 runs to complete 11,000 ODI runs.His pull shots had precision, his cuts carried flair, and there were no mishits.

He even unleashed a cool reverse sweep off Rashid, pure dominance was written in his innings.He signaled his intent early, charging down to Gus Atkinson for a four before flicking a six over mid-wicket with ease that had the Rohit-esque flair.Against Saqib Mahmood, he opened the bat face to loft a stunning six over cover as he seemed to have got his mojo back.

Brief Scores: England: 304 all out in 49.5 overs (Ben Duckett 65, Joe Root 69, Liam Livingstone 41; Ravindra Jadeja 3/35) lost to India: 308/6 in 44.3 overs (Rohit Sharma 119, Shubman Gill 60, Shreyas Iyer 44; Jamie Overton 2/27) by 4 wickets. —*PTI*

Floodlight failure halts game for 35 minutes

In a major embarrassment for the BCCI, a floodlight failure interrupted play in the second ODI between India and England for about 35 minutes at the Barabati Stadium, here on Sunday. India was cruising at 48 for no loss in 6.1 overs in a chase of 305 when one of the eight floodlights near the clock tower failed, forcing players out of the field. The issue first surfaced around 6:15 pm when some floodlights briefly went off but the power supply was restored as England pacer Saqib Mahmood was about to bowl to Rohit Sharma. However, moments later, the lights went out completely, leaving the players frustrated. "The generator attached to the floodlight malfunctioned.

38TH NATIONAL GAMES

Jyothi and Tejas Shirse win third straight gold

DEHRADUN, 9 FEB

Shire and Yarraji, both national record holders in their respective events, had won gold in the 2022 and 2023 editions in Gujarat and Goa.

The 25-year-old Yarraji, the reigning Asian champion and silver medallist in the Hangzhou Asian Games in 2023, clocked 13.10 seconds in the final to better her own earlier National Games record of 13.22 seconds, which she had set in the 2023 edition.

Her national record stands at 12.78 seconds which he had set in 2023.

Moumita Mondal of West Bengal claimed the silver with a time of 13.36 seconds while Nithya Ramraj (13.60 seconds) of Tamil Nadu took the bronze.

The 22-year-old Shirse clocked 13.65 seconds to better her own earlier National Games record of 13.71 seconds which he had set in the 2023 edition. He had clocked 13.84 seconds while winning the gold in the 2022 edition.

His national record stands at 13.41 seconds which he had set last year.

Haryana pockets 2 gold from netball

Haryana clinched two gold medals in netball as their men's and women's teams beat hosts Uttarakhand and Rajasthan in the finals respectively at the National Games here on Sunday.

In the men's team final, Haryana won a closely-fought match 74-71 over Uttarakhand to win the gold. Himachal Pradesh and Delhi won a bronze each.

Haryana had beaten Delhi and Uttarakhand had defeated Himachal Pradesh in the semi-finals on Saturday.

Vaidehi enters women's singles semifinals

Defending champion Vaidehi Chaudhary of Gujarat reached the semifinals of the women's singles event of the tennis competition at the National Games here on Sunday.

Jyothi Yarraji

Vaidehi defeated Anjali Rathi of Haryana 6-1, 6-1 in a one-sided quarterfinal match. She will face Maharashtra's Akanksha Nitture in the semifinals on Monday.

Akanksha beat Laxmi Siri Dandu of Telangana 6-3, 4-6, 6-2 in another quarterfinal match. —*PTI*

English women's hockey team arrives in Odisha

BHUBANESWAR, 9 FEB

English women's hockey team arrived in Bhubaneswar on Sunday to participate in the India leg matches of the FIH Hockey Pro League 2024-25.

The world number seven team will face hosts India on 15 February and number one Netherlands on February 25 at Kalinga stadium here.

The team members were given a rousing welcome by Odisha Sports Department and Hockey India upon their arrival at Biju Patnaik International Airport here. Hockey India, on its official website, said that with one win and three losses so far, England has made a rocky start to their FIH Pro League campaign and will be hoping to turn things around despite facing challenging opponents. "We are very excited to be in India especially after the Hero Hockey India League, expecting the atmosphere to be really big. This is my first time in India, but the buzz around hockey here is nothing like I have ever seen, so I am extremely excited," England Forward Darcy Bourne was quoted as saying by Hockey India on its website.

Despite struggling at the World Cups recently, England is the current Commonwealth champions after the gold medal win in 2022. —*PTI*

FREESTYLE CHESS

Gukesh takes on Caruana in QFs

HAMBURG, 9 FEB

World champion D Gukesh will take on Fabiano Caruana of the United States in the two-game quarterfinal after the latter picked the Indian in a unique format typical of the Freestyle Chess Grand Slam.

Finishing eighth among 10 participants, Gukesh just about made it to the knockout stage edging out Vladimir Fedoseev of Slovenia and Levon Aronian of the United States, the last two finishers in the round-robin stage that was played under rapid-chess rules. As per the tournament rules, the top three have the right to decide their opponents in the quarterfinal and Firouzja picked Vincent Keymer of Germany as his opponent. Sindarov surprised everyone by going for Hikaru Nakamura of the United States a formidable name in Chess 960 while Caruana opted for Gukesh, leaving out Norwegian Magnus Carlsen and Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan to battle it out. The knockout will be a different format and will be played under classical chess rules. This attempt could be a path-breaker for the new variant on the 64 squares in which the piece position is changed just before the start of the round and the real chess skills are tested instead of the opening-game knowledge.

There are 960 different ways to set up the pieces, hence the version was, until now, popularly known as 'Chess 960'.

The tournament has a prize pool of USD 750,000 out of which USD 200,000 is reserved for the winner. So far, five tournaments have been announced this year and there is an additional bonus of USD 150,000, 100,000, and 50,000 for the top-three finishers. —*PTI*

AFTER 14 YEARS

Australia secures first test series win in Sri Lanka

GALLE, 9 FEB

Australia wrapped up a comprehensive 2-0 series victory over Sri Lanka, sealing the second test with a commanding nine-wicket win in Galle on Sunday.

Top order batter Marnus Labuschagne flicked a delivery from retiring Sri Lankan player Dimuth Karunaratne to mid-wicket to complete the triumph, just 15 minutes before lunch on the fourth day. It's Australia's first test series win on Sri Lankan soil since 2011.

Sri Lanka resumed Sunday on 211-8, holding a slender lead of just 54 runs, with much riding on vice-captain Kusal Mendis, who had remained unbeaten overnight.

Mendis brought up his second half-century in the game by guiding Nathan Lyon to deep cover but perished in the same over, caught at short square leg by Steve Smith.

The dismissal was a milestone moment – Smith's 200th Test catch, a feat previously achieved by only four players: Jacques Kallis, Mahela Jayawardene, Rahul Dravid, and Joe Root. Beau Webster wrapped up the innings soon after, leaving Australia with a modest target of 75 runs.

Australia's team members pose with the Warn-Muralitharan trophy at the end of second test cricket match PHOTO: PTI

Sri Lanka briefly found hope when Prabath Jayasuriya removed Travis Head (20) early, caught behind. However, Usman Khawaja (27 not out) and Marnus Labuschagne (26 not out) calmly guided the visitors home with an unbroken 37-run stand. Alex Carey was named Man of the Match for his outstanding 156 and four dismissals behind the stumps.

His innings stand as the highest score by an Australian wicketkeeper in Asia. Karunaratne farewell Sri Lanka slumped to its fourth straight defeat and marked a disappointing end for 36-year-old opener Karunaratne in his 100th and final test. "Very emotional day for me. It has been a long career," said Karunratne who scored 7,222 runs at 39.25 with 16 centuries. "When I started my cricket, I Just wanted to play one test match. To go on to play 100 Tests was amazing.

Australia 414 (Carey 156, Smith 131, Jayasuriya 5-151) and 75 for 1 (Khawaja 27*, Labuschagne 26*) beat Sri Lanka 257 (Kusal 85, Chandimal 74, Starc 3-37) & 231 (Mathews 76, Kusal 50, Kuhnemann 4-63, Lyon 4-84) by 9 wickets —*PTI*

Mbappé and Álvarez score as Madrid ends in 1-1 draw

MADRID, 9 FEB

Kylian Mbappé scored in his first capital derby against Atletico Madrid as Real Madrid fought back for a 1-1 draw and kept its slim lead in the Spanish league on Saturday.

Next up for Mbappé and Madrid is a trip to Manchester City on Tuesday for the first leg of their Champions League knockout round playoff.

Julián Álvarez put Atletico ahead from the penalty spot in the 35th minute. Mbappé equalized in the 50th for the hosts, which stayed one point ahead of Atletico in the standings. Jude Bellingham hit the crossbar with a header as Madrid searched for a second goal. Atletico goalkeeper Jan Olbak made saves to deny Rodrygo, Vinícius Júnior, and Mbappé to split the points at the Santiago Bernabeu.

"We knew how to hang in there and had our chances," Álvarez said. "We are in the fight and will stay in it right to the end."

Atletico, which spent big last summer to acquire Álvarez and other reinforcements, is trying to add to league titles in 2021 and 2014 under coach Diego Simeone.

is five points behind Madrid before visiting Sevilla on Sunday. —*PTI*

Dhamne wins maiden Pro ITF singles title in Tunisia

NEW DELHI, 9 FEB

Promising Indian youngster Manas Dhamne on Sunday clinched his maiden ITF singles title with a come-from-behind win over Italy's Lorenzo Carboni in the summit clash of the M15 tournament in Monastir, Tunisia.

Dhamne, who trains in Italy under renowned coach Riccardo Piatti, overcame the first-set deficit to come out a 2-6 6-0 6-2 winner against Carboni, who had reached the junior French Open semifinals last year. The 17-year-old had entered the main draw as a qualifier, thus winning eight matches on the trot in as many days. Interestingly, he had played his first ever Men's Future event. —*PTI*

Kyrian overcomes Elias to win Chennai Open

CHENNAI, 9 FEB

Frenchman Kyrian Jacquet fought past Sweden's Elias Ymer in straight sets to clinch the Chennai Open ATP Challenger singles title here on Sunday.

Jacquet registered a 7-6 (1), 6-4 victory in an hour and 37 minutes. Jacquet, ranked No. 273 in the world, got off to a fast start breaking Ymer in the very first game of the match and then consolidated it with a hold. However, Ymer ranked 332 in the world, broke his opponent in the eighth game to level the first set at 4-4. With both players holding their next two service games with ease, the set headed into a tiebreaker which Jacquet won easily 7-1.

PHOTO: PTI

The Frenchman again broke early in the second set to build a 4-1 lead only to see Ymer fight back to level the set at 4-4. Jacquet was able to then hold his serve and break the Swede in the 10th game to complete the win.

This was the second title for Jacquet on the ATP Challenger Tour while Ymer, a six-time champion on the ATP Challenger Tour already —*PTI*

NO DOMESTIC TROPHY

Chelsea out of FA Cup at Brighton

MANCHESTER, 9 FEB

Brighton's Kaoru Mitoma sent Chelsea crashing out of the FA Cup as the Japan star sealed a 2-1 win in the fourth round, while Kevin De Bruyne spared Manchester City's blushes in their 2-1 victory at third-tier Leyton Orient on Saturday. Chelsea haven't won a domestic trophy since lifting the FA Cup in 2018 and their wait will go on for another season after they blew the lead at the Amex Stadium. Enzo Maresca's side were gifted the lead in the fifth minute when Brighton keeper Bart Verbruggen fumbled Cole Palmer's cross into his net.

It was a horrendous mistake but Chelsea failed to press home their advantage.

Thrashed 7-0 at Nottingham Forest in the Premier League last weekend, Brighton bounced back impressively from the second-worst defeat in the club's 123-year history.

Chelsea were beaten at Brighton despite taking the lead PHOTO: @CHELSEAFC

Roma bags 1-0 win over Venezia in SerieA

Paulo Dybala netted his first goal of 2025 to help a much-changed Roma team to a 1-0 win at relegation-threatened Venezia in Serie A on Sunday.Dybala powerfully converted a second-half penalty after teammate Angelino was tripped by Venezia defender Alessandro Marcandalli.